

**PARADIGMS OF CHANGE:
NEW ARTICULATION OF RELATIONSHIPS
IN THE WORKS OF DENISE LEVERTOV,
MAXINE HONG KINGSTON, NIKKI GIOVANNI AND
PAULA GUNN ALLEN**

**Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH**

By

TESSY ANTHONY C.
Department of English
St. Teresa's College
Ernakulam - 682011
Kerala, India

To

Mahatma Gandhi University
Kottayam

Supervisor

Dr. P. M. CHACKO
Research Centre, Department of English
Union Christian College
Alwaye - 683102
Kerala, India

March 2007

DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that the thesis, **Paradigms of Change: New Articulation of Relationships in the Works of Denise Levertov, Maxine Hong Kingston, Nikki Giovanni and Paula Gunn Allen** is a record of bonafide studies and research work done by me under the guidance and supervision of **Dr. P.M. Chacko** and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.



Tessy Anthony C.
Department of English
St. Teresa's College
Ernakulam - 682011
Kerala, India.

Always
21. 03. 2007

CERTIFICATE

I do hereby certify that the thesis, **Paradigms of Change: New Articulation of Relationships in the Works of Denise Levertov, Maxine Hong Kingston, Nikki Giovanni and Paula Gunn Allen** is a record of bonafide research work carried out by Ms. Tessy Anthony C, under my supervision and guidance.



Dr. P.M. Chacko
Research Centre, Department of English
Union Christian College
Alwaye-683 102
Kerala , India.

Alwaye
21. 03. 2007

To my father whose absence is like presence

To my mother in whose presence is my essence

To my husband who taught me to pursue excellence

To my daughters who made the difference

To my Lord I give myself with great reverence

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to offer my gratitude to Dr. P. M. Chacko, whose valuable guidance, meticulous corrections, constructive criticism and perceptive skills helped me at every stage of my work. His patience and understanding have been of immense value in the progress of my work. I gratefully remember his wife Prof. Mariaugusta and her hospitality.

I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude to my Principal Sr. Christabelle, whose warmth and encouragement stood me in good stead. I cannot forget the kindness of Ms. Juliet Venadt the former librarian and the library staff of St. Teresa's College, all my H. O. Ds and Department members.

I would like to thank the Principal of Union Christian College Alwaye, Dr. Varghese John, the former Principal Dr. Raju John, the successive Heads of the Department of English, Prof. Johnappa and Prof. A.M. Geevarghese for their genuine interest and suggestions. The support received from the Department members has been stimulating. I thank the librarian and library staff of Union Christian College.

For intellectual interchanges I am obliged to Dr. Heather Neff of Eastern Michigan University, Prof. Virginia C. Fowler of Virginia Tech University, a friend and colleague of Nikki Giovanni, Prof. Albert Gelpi of Stanford University, a good friend and colleague of Denise Levertov. I thank them for the much-awaited e-mails, for furthering my interests in this area and in helping me to see through the diverse cultures.

Both the librarians of U.S.I.S and former A.S.R.C., especially Mr. Mohammed Khayyum, were kind to offer me their services. My stay and library work at the C.I.E.F.L. also paved the way for the completion of this work.

I am fortunate to be in touch with my writers. I thank Paula Gunn Allen, Nikki Giovanni, Denise Levertov and Maxine Hong Kingston for sending me material and valuable e-mails that set me thinking and whetting my appetite. I also thank my cousin Gita and Jenny Aunty for sending me books from the U.S.

I thank Prof. C.S. Jayaram, Dr. Janaki Sreedharan and Dr. Anitha Devasia who were there to lend me a helping hand. I am grateful to Ms. Rajeswari Menon for frequent use of her storehouse of books. I can't help mentioning the camaraderie I shared with my friends Prof. Gladys Francis and Ms. Susan George who stood by me in the ups and downs of research.

Words cannot express how deeply beholden I am to my husband Charles Paul – my first reader and daughters Nina and Navia for their constant reminders, “have you completed?”

Ernakulam

March 21, 2007

Tessy Anthony C.

ABSTRACT

Discussing hybridity in the American context is problematized by the absence of familiar terms of comprehension. Hybridity in genetic-racial or native-immigrant terms is a primary condition of America. Racial or cultural differences create divisions at the experiential level. The differences are absorbed to some extent by the dynamics of assimilation. The hybridity elements gradually weaken to be absorbed into the mainstream but for residual differences that surface on occasions. However, hybridity retains its cultural vigour during transition.

Denise Levertov, Maxine Hong Kingston, Nikki Giovanni and Paula Gunn Allen are tagged Ethnic Americans. There is a strong presence of the American mainstream in their work. But the ethnic constituent is equally dominant. Hence their articulation is marked by dynamic points of change from the mainstream tonalities. The points of divergence are dynamic in the sense that these are constantly shifting, towards and away from the direction of assimilation. Their works resist mainstream approximations. The ethnic and the mainstream create a unique tension of unresolved assimilation. The poetic and imaginative paradigms of these writers reflect the need for a plural consciousness. It is only through a plural consciousness that their perspectives, belief systems, and experiential grids can be comprehended. The experiential and ethical subtleties that their work reflects require a reception that is constituted of unresolved elements of ethnic and mainstream reference. Hybridity forges a new identity owing to the paradigm shift in perception and approach. Their writings manifest this new articulation – of their relationship to community and the mainstream that stems from their hybridity.

PREFACE

Born in a Naval Base in Bombay, I had a very early exposure to multicultural life. The influence of various cultures equipped me with a plural consciousness. In fact, this made me a misfit initially in a conventional environment in Kerala where I settled later. The process of assimilation was fraught with recalcitrance and opposition. The transition resulted in cultural residues surfacing on occasions. Unresolved angularities created in me a unique tension. And it is this emotional and cultural push-pull that provoked me as a researcher to work on this topic which is entitled **Paradigms of Change: New Articulation of Relationships in the works of Denise Levertov, Maxine Hong Kingston, Nikki Giovanni and Paula Gunn Allen.**

The chapter plan below unveils the scheme of the study. Chapter I introduces the study. Chapter II Ethnicity: the Multicultural Context identifies and analyses some of the key concepts. Chapter III deals with Hybridity: New Perspectives on Emergent Relationships and discusses the hybridity of Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen resulting from changes and resulting in changes. Chapter IV is about Gynosophic Relationships – it looks at women ethnic identities articulating a changed perspective in their unique relationships with the community and the mainstream. Chapter V Dislocating Language into New Relationships discusses how language is artistically manipulated to generate new meanings. Chapter VI entitled The Spiritual Dynamics of Relationships charts the authors' spiritual evolution in terms of relationships. Chapter VII is the Conclusion marked by findings of the study.

American history was, for a long time, a white oriented one. Slowly the non-whites started recreating and rewriting history. Most ethnic women were illiterate and survived suffering through talk stories, quilting, gardening and doing something practical and creative. Today most of them are literate and survive their suffering by engaging themselves creatively amidst sufferings. So they resist injustices and discriminations through writing. Kingston, Giovanni, Levertov and Allen are hybrids. They make an ethical interrogation of both community and the mainstream and assert their hybrid stance. Through their interfaces their old identity begins to dissolve and a new self emerges. On being empowered, they reflect their experiences to sensitize people. By writing they reveal changes in themselves, triggered off by hybridity, and also bring about change in others.

The hybrids symbolise a confluence of cultures; so they feel emotionally dislocated. There is a strong presence of the mainstream in their work. But the ethnic constituent is equally dominant. Experiencing the push-pull is a proof of the negation of the race concept. The change in their relationship with the community and the mainstream is due to the ethnic and American elements within. As a result the hybrid has a new set of values, and a subsequent change of style of functioning, a paradigm shift.

Writers under this study are hybrids who undergo a double discrimination of gender and race. Exposure to the mainstream culture equips them to war against injustices. Their changed value systems are expressed from a hybrid woman's perspective. They express themselves in fractured English which is appropriated from the mainstream but reveals racial accents. All the time they reveal their relationship to the

mainstream and community. They assert their identity through linguistic and narrative techniques, and push English still further to new possibilities.

Hybridity has resulted in mixed belief systems and values which emerge from deep convictions. Hence Kingston, Giovanni, Allen and Levertov follow a new world view mixing American and ethnic elements. This new outlook energizes them and strengthens them. In the rush of civilization persons and social groups are likely to lose their identity owing to the bulldozing effect of multiculturalism. Persons become cogs in a machine, part of a faceless crowd. The hybrid identity is a new identity emerging from this situation. It continues to draw ethical and creative energy from their ethnic moorings. Their cosmopolitanism and broad perspectives transcend the reductive paradigm of the American mainstream. After globalization, when dialogues between cultures are faster and at close quarters, there is a resurgence of ethnicity and hybrid identity. These women ethnic identities have become bold to assert their views when compared with the early immigrants. This study helps to determine the changes that their articulations signify with relation to the American mainstream. Recognized as voices from the margins they are able to accelerate the eradication of injustices against subaltern women. English, the language of globalization, has undergone change, and has several shades to it. It has been altered because of linguistic appropriation, and one notices that each ethnic hybrid identity uses English differently revealing “ethnicity” in discourses. These hybrids from their experiential grid are forced to construct a belief system which they practise. Unlike rituals blindly practised in one’s community they intellectually change and think before accepting a new belief which expresses their dualities.

It is out of a sense of belonging that ethnic identities, in spite of their differences, etch a space for themselves as Americans leaning heavily on the fact that all Americans are immigrants except the Native Indians. It is a global warning which implies that unless the mainstream cultures offer enough space for ethnic identities conflicts are bound to increase the world over.

CONTENTS

Chapters	Page No.
I INTRODUCTION	1
II ETHNICITY: THE MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT	26
III HYBRIDITY: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON EMERGENT RELATIONSHIPS	86
IV GYNOSOPHIC RELATIONSHIPS	134
V DISLOCATING LANGUAGE INTO NEW RELATIONSHIPS	187
VI THE SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS OF RELATIONSHIPS	240
VII CONCLUSION	294
WORKS CITED	

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is the changing scenario of relationships with reference to four ethnic groups represented by four American authors: Denise Levertov, Paula Gunn Allen, Maxine Hong Kingston and Nikki Giovanni. The study explores the paradigms of change which reflect the relationships of these ethnic writers within their community and with the mainstream American culture. The achievements, the debacles, the problems and the future possibilities of these relationships are analysed. These writers of ethnic identity are open and bold, and articulate their positions in voices of their own. Based on their own first hand experiences vis-à-vis American mainstream culture they have their own styles of dealing with relationships marked by individuality and assertiveness.

Paradigms stem from, and are maintained by, certain basic relationships of human beings in society and environment. These relationships are with family, personal relationships, and relationships with society (community and outside the community). Material comforts, education, economic independence and constant exposure to Americanization have made Kingston, Giovanni, Allen and Levertov articulate their relationships differently in their personal lives and in their work. They have moved from the parochial national stance to a subject position challenging old paradigms and regressive relationships to foster new relationships that ground them firmly. They challenge racism and ethnocentrism, and end up with dual or multiple loyalties based on ethnicity, language and other factors.

The contradicting pull of multiple loyalties creates ambivalence. They feel the interrupting influence of class, gender and race affecting their relationships. They find in their lives and texts that they are ethically “‘singular’” (Spivak 183) to conceal, and at the same time wanting to reveal, influenced by the domains of gender, race and class intersecting one another. Allen writes for cultural interface and empowerment. In her discussion of issues she takes the position of the Native American English-speaking hybrid though she remembers her mother telling, “‘Don’t forget you’re Indian’” (*Life is a Fatal Disease* 39). She asserts her disapproval of the mainstream but uses English of the mainstream to be heard worldwide. Kingston, the Chinese American, writes in English which was disapproved by her family as she tells her mother in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*:

It’s your fault I talk weird. The only reason I flunked kindergarten was because you couldn’t teach me English, and you gave me a zero IQ. I’ve brought my IQ up, though. They say I’m smart now. Things follow in lines at school. They take stories and teach us to turn them into essays. I don’t need anybody to pronounce English words for me. I can figure them out by myself. (201)

Kingston studied in an American public school and learnt of freedom, democracy, equality and individualism. She was told by her parents not to ape the West and to be silent about their secrets. Her silence was misunderstood by the mainstream as submissiveness and docility. It was actually a move to keep the alien American ways at bay away from corrupting Chinese cultural values. She writes in English explicitly

explicating her situation and speaking against crippling Chinese patriarchy. American values have exposed her to a new identity which has freed her from inhibitions.

Writers of ethnic identity question the position of migrant population. They formulate a counter discourse to the sanctioned ignorance of the mainstream American idea of the subaltern. Only the under-privileged will clamour for justice in an unjust world. The work of Kingston, Giovanni, Allen and Levertov is an intellectual and emotional journey of a search for identity which stems from duality. The body of their work is an attempt to develop a reading method to understand gender, race and class, and to deconstruct the fossilized superiority of mainstream America through texts. Thus they re-open closed and demarcated boundaries by expressing their perceptions in new voices. They imply new directions in the analysis of ideological relations between mainstream America and ethnic minorities. They make the former aware that they owe the latter several debts, and put cultural pressure on the mainstream Americans. They check several of the mainstream's moves towards advancement as destructive and regressive. They create for themselves a third space as a critique and an agency of counter hegemonic resistance.

On encountering a new culture or living as a second-generation immigrant amidst an alien culture, quite different from the one that one practises in one's own ethnic enclave, one is bound to experience a cultural shock. At the experiential level assimilating ethnocentric experiences can create certain ambivalent attitudes towards the mainstream. Ideals and progressive thinking of the mainstream also effect a changed behaviour in ethnic identities. Orthodox notions of community that are deep help in character building, and create certain very specific attitudes to one's own culture. These

attitudes boil down to certain belief systems. It is belief systems that shape behaviours. And behaviours are, in turn, responsible for reflecting changes in relationships. The paradigms of change are in hybridity, in occupying subject position, beliefs, in womanly perspectives and in the use of the English language. Upon encountering American individualism, free enterprise and education, there is a mixing of American elements with ethnic cultural ethos. Their identity evolves as a sum total of their ethos and American influences. According to Jules Chametzky in *Our Decentralised Literature*, “an acculturated existence” (4) is a duality. The impact of two cultures forces them for new articulations in English. This bicultural/multicultural stance determines the way in which they articulate changes in their relationships.

After Americanisation Levertov, Giovanni, Kingston and Allen are virtual misfits in their community. They speak a different voice since there is something new in their attitudes. They are useful misfits who are role models to others. They break away very subtly from the conventional ways of community and mainstream. These visible attitudinal changes are represented in their works. They evolve an identity and a belief system that are generated from their experiences and relationships.

In America the canon of the mainstream is to stereotype writers of ethnic identity as exotic subalterns. Besides, the sufferings of women writers of ethnic identity are different when compared with the inequalities suffered by the mainstream women. Yet they are included in the blanket term of White feminism. Since these ethnic women identities are not heard they resist and seize power to avoid erasure by voicing the unvoiced. Belief systems of their ethos and mainstream values are altered and modified to suit their needs. By writing and re-representing themselves they rip off the label of the

silenced subaltern. The relationships discussed in this study are broadly divided into two: within the community and with the mainstream.

Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen search for a new identity not being satisfied with the old one as aliens. They neither want to shirk their community values nor be intimidated by the mainstream. They want to have a new set of values, a new set of attitudes and a subsequent change of functioning resulting from combined cultures. In their psyche they keep comparing the old community and the new mainstream values. If they wish to forget their old country, consciously or unconsciously, they are reminded by ethnocentric gibes. Face to face with the mainstream culture, they disapprove of its many ways, and voice this disapproval. All failures to be accepted by the mainstream on an equal footing have made them retaliate. Experiences of marginalisation have made them want to prove their mettle. Subsequently, they wish to assert their new identity. They want to create a sense of awareness as to what is happening to hybrids like them. They do not want their fellowmen to undergo anything similar to what they went through. They want the world to acknowledge the emergence of hybrids. They are deeply involved in the changes occurring outside. Hence there is a shift in paradigm. There are changes, which are the fountainhead of a new identity, which they have carved for themselves. Ethnic identity is likely to be asserted as a social phenomenon all over the world in spite of all attempts at integration and merger of differences. The rise of a class of hybrids is highly visible across the world.

Hybridity in genetic-racial or native-immigrant terms is a primary condition of America. When ethnics assert this new identity that stems from dualism they feel a sense of belonging. Moreover, racial or cultural differences create divisions at the experiential

level. The writers wish to highlight their differences. So not only do they wish to fight erasure but also resist the distorted mainstream representation. The presence of multiple ethnic identities in societies has come to be a social reality.

Kingston articulates her new identity including her own voice within the Chinese myth, “She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, [. . .]” but she decides she “[. . .] would have to grow up a warrior woman” (*Woman Warrior* 20). Patricia Lin Blinde says, “Kingston’s task is thus not one of drawing corresponding portraits of any single verified situation, her task is to record the struggle of the human imagination as it attempts to make sense of the input of human fictions, fictions which pour in from all facets of *quotidien* (sic) living under the rubric of culture, philosophy and history” (70).

Kingston wishes to express herself as ““a female avenger”” (*Woman Warrior* 43) and a swords-woman, who makes her mark, and wins the respect of her people and the mainstream. Nikki Giovanni opines that the mainstream does not have to represent writers of ethnic identity. Writers of ethnic identity can easily represent themselves, and more accurately. In her poem “nikki-rosa” she says:

and I really hope no white person ever has cause
to write about me
because they never understand
Black love is Black wealth and they’ll
probably talk about my hard childhood
and never understand that
all the while I was quite happy [. . .] (*Ego-tripping* 16-17)

Giovanni wishes to fight erasure, and represent herself as she thinks it fit. All the time what the mainstream has to say about them need not be right. Allen too resists the mainstream depiction of the Native Indian, and causes awareness among people of the superior culture practised by the Lagunas. In her Introduction to *Spider Woman's Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women* she says, "These stories demonstrate the Indian slogan, 'We shall endure,' powerfully and tellingly. Although we've been disappeared (sic) from American consciousness, we never go away" (25). This indicates the Native Indian's attempts at preserving culture. Similarly while everyone is pursuing American standards of living, modernity, technocratic capitalistic society, Denise Levertov advocates an ecological philosophy which is an essential part of her view of life, which goes against the materialistic mainstream.

On encountering another culture, national consciousness is awakened in writers of ethnic identity resulting in a clamour for ethnic space. They have an axe to grind with the mainstream that has been condescending. Seizing the space and writing to assert their identity they soon grow in number, become a major voice and sub culture. Ethnic identity and gender identity are causative factors that play a pivotal role in deciding human positions and relations. There are advantages and disadvantages to each culture. But each subculture adds a little flavour to modern American life. Slowly but certainly, ethnic groups get a space within the mainstream. When it is noticed, it becomes a large sub culture. A subculture is open to changes. They first assert their ethos, and slowly a mixing and mingling takes place in life style and values. This fusion is called hybridization. This blending in the ethnic American between ethnic and American ways

of life is positive and negative. This hybridization is revealed in the works of the four authors under this study.

Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen are writers of ethnic minority. When placed in a mainstream culture they stand out because of ethnic differences. In the country of their cultural past the paradigms they lived by are different from what they encounter in the mainstream. All of them have lived in a patriarchal and patrilineal society. But the patriarchy they have lived in is not inimical to them. Kingston, Giovanni, Levertov and Allen do not just close off all spaces of power from women but it is interesting to note how they negotiate both cultures and how they try to build an identity getting sustenance from both native culture and borrowed culture.

These paradigm shifts have made these writers of ethnic minorities break away from hegemonic structures, and resist mainstream representation. This shift from the inhibited selves of the past to the confident selves in the present has made them articulate new relationships of women in society. An analytical examination of human relationships, of the self pitted against society and the self looking for its worth is made in the search for their authentic self. Being women they play an important role both in the family and in society, and being liberal feminists they have to rework family relationships, power relationships, and articulate women's role and language. They deconstruct predominantly male paradigms and reconstruct a female perspective and experience in an effort to change the tradition that has silenced and marginalized the ethnic women identities. The inequalities of the sexes are a cultural construct. And the male perspective is looked on as a universal one. So, several paradigms are deconstructed on issues of gender, and the cultural forces that support it.

These writers evolve an identity and a belief system generated from their experiences and relationships. Ethnic pressure insulates them from English and American ways. But they write and speak in English adding their own flavour to the language. Thus they rebel against the crippling nature of their ethos. They organize propaganda movements, and fight against marginalisation. They rebel against mainstream establishments, becoming single parents, and one even an unwed mother, giving her child her family name and being as unique as possible. Growing up in America influenced by ideals of democracy, free enterprise, Christianity and individualism, they realize that hegemonies are established when ideologies gain popular consent. Hence they decide to articulate their hybrid existence and assert their identity. However much they appear ethnic they cannot be only ethnic. These writers position themselves as against or partially appropriating the mainstream which relates with them in a peculiar way. They have made efforts to liberate women from the structures that have marginalized them based on gender and race, and seek to reinterpret and to change the world.

Denise Levertov was born in Ilford, Essex in 1923, and later taught creative writing at Stanford University, California. Levertov is a first generation immigrant. Of the four writers under discussion she alone was not nurtured in the American environment. She arrived in 1948 after her marriage to American writer Mitchell Goodman. She carried with her mystical experiences which were part of her Jewish heritage. Her father was a Russian Jew, converted to Christianity, who later became an Anglican minister.

In the case of Levertov, from her mother she learns to look at nature, and delight in its sights and sounds. She transcends the humdrum and the ordinary by seeing the

sacred in everyday reality. Within her, one finds a blend of pantheism and Christianity. For her every step is an arrival closer to her creator. Encounters with the mainstream Americans made her realize her values were in contrast to the mainstream. The mainstream is a political and cultural construct vulnerable to interrogation. The cultural configuration of mainstream life is narcissistic, ecologically destructive, racist, and one of technological advancement. According to her the mainstream Americans are imperialistic, capitalistic, predatory and materialistic. So Levertov takes refuge in Hasidic beliefs which see the sacred in the secular. Her personal life is instilled with Jewish Hasidic beliefs. It becomes a way of life for her. According to her Christianity is an expression of Christ's love for mankind. And unable to experience this in the American soil she comes into conflict with mainstream Christianity. Her journey is of the self looking inwards – Hasidic – a rediscovery of roots (Hasidism). This lies dormant in her and is awakened when there is an ideological conflict. She projects America as an urban garden of racism, war, imperialism, ecological devastation and nuclear parks. And in a new voice she articulates change in America and in America's relationship to other nations which stem from convictions in her own relationships and Hasidism.

Levertov, is a staunch advocate of an ecological philosophy. This is one of the most subversive of weapons against capitalistic and mainstream values. She expresses her love for Nature and its preservation in her public speeches. Her involvement in the Ban the Bomb marches and in the anti-war campaigns and her work as a civilian nurse during the war manifest her active involvement in social life which proves her commitment to social values. An ecological mode of thinking does focus on the question of how one ought to act in a project of mutually beneficial existence. Levertov realizes that the I-It

relationship has to move to the I-Thou relationship, and it should become a way of life, and only then she will be fulfilling her duties of Hasidic faith and bring herself to a closer relationship with God.

In her poems Levertov reveals that she experiences spiritual and intellectual alienation living in America. Ideologically American life is unacceptable to her because of its spiritual aridity. She wants a value system more than freedom. She is individualistic enough to frown upon mainstream materialism. In the collection she wrote towards the end of her life she mentions the mainstream's obsession with technology, a nuclear world, war policies and power supremacy. But this, she discerns, has an adverse effect on man – destruction, ill health, rivalry, inhuman behaviour, environmental pollution, alienation and above all the wrath of God. After the Vietnam War she has a hands-on experience of racism, and speaks against it. Economic independence, education and better standards of living help her to achieve a broader perspective and a greater tolerance. Her search for identity leads her to a bicultural stance.

Levertov never rebels against her community nor does the clannish instinct prevail in her not having experienced a larger communal life. She is neither for nor against her community. But Hasidism and Jewish values are a part of her identity. To be a part of America means to be a part of the bandwagon of success. Like the others she wraps American successes to erase community frowns. She goes still further to advocate a global community of mankind. The idea that the individual perceives the divine in all things becomes a felt need, and it conflicts with her exposure to the American way of life. Thus is changed her whole pattern of life both consciously and unconsciously.

Chinese American Maxine Hong Kingston, a second-generation immigrant, was born Ting Ting Hong (1940) in Stockton, California. Her first language Say Yup is a dialect of Cantonese. Her parents made a living running a laundry. She rebelled against her mother's fear of Americanisation, feeling it was useless and restricting since she wanted to get on in the world. She wrote and spoke in English. She was told not to talk to "ghosts" i.e. Americans, because her mother feared that the Chinese values in her daughter would get corrupted if her daughter kept in touch with the mainstream. Kingston's works portray her identity as both Chinese and American. She has become a mouthpiece of the hyphenated Chinese. Her public speeches and talks reflect the hyphenated Chinese's life as a crucible of oppression and marginalisation. She is the most polemic, the most incendiary and revolutionary of all the four writers. The stark realism of her works is a clarion call to revolution and self-actualisation. In her, one finds the conflict between the slave/wife and the warrior. Elizabeth J. Ordonez says of Kingston, "The new woman warrior is Chinese but also unmistakably American: she will not allow menstrual days to interrupt her training; her new-born rides with her into battle secured by a sling beneath her armor. Above all, she calls herself 'a female avenger', 'freeing imprisoned women from captivity, tearing down ancestral tablets'" (26) thus imagining herself to be an emancipator of women.

National consciousness is a necessary stage in politicization of female characters struggling to decolonise their minds. Kingston explains in *The Woman Warrior* how she had to leave home and all conservative, crippling and inhibiting notions, to make some progress forward. She says, "I had to leave home in order to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing" (*Woman Warrior* 204). Kingston feels torn between her

American experiences and her ethos. She falls ill for a long time and remains indoors doing nothing. Though she likes her mother and her Chinese ancestry, she rejects crippling norms and stereotypes. On coming to terms with her Chinese American identity she says, “One night [. . .] my throat burst open. I stood up, talking and burbling” (*Woman Warrior* 200-201). The woman warrior Kingston, fights her way fending Chinese orthodox norms, crippling sexist gibes and freeing her feet from the binds of cultural restrictions. Admonished not to talk or mix with the mainstream she breaks all regulations, and becomes most articulate. Exposed to two cultures, her works reflect her hybridity.

Kingston preserves Chinese Buddhist values and her texts resonate with Chinese community life and cultural heritage. Her respect for elders and her interest in upholding relationships between family members by maintaining an extended family even today is very Chinese. She retells myths and reworks legends and stories to consolidate her space. Her perspectives spark off the feminist who strives for equality but forges ahead to reveal the superior role women play. As a peace activist and a woman advocating peace she elevates the position of women transcending gender boundaries. She uses local myth and gives it a universal significance. Kingston’s is a discernible commitment to peace, which is not drawn from the mainstream matrix.

Yolande Cornelia Giovanni (1943), the Black American writer is a fourth generation slave immigrant. Her works reflect Womanist concerns and Black sentiments. The plight of the first slaves, discriminations of the mainstream, alienation and exploitation are recurrent themes in her works since she herself is a victim of socio-cultural alienation. Giovanni from the outset has been a militant. She exhorts Blacks to

rebel and retaliate through her works. Blacks are called to assert their identity. She awakens them from their physical and mental colonization by the mainstream. Virginia C. Fowler, a friend and colleague of Giovanni, in the Foreword to “Racism” says, “What is constant in Nikki Giovanni from her first book of poems to this most recent collection, are the fundamental values that shape her vision of society, culture, and life itself: a belief in the necessity to fight injustice wherever it appears and in whatever form” (*Prosaic* 378). Giovanni takes part in several propaganda movements against the marginalisation of Blacks. Her scathing indictment of anything detrimental to Black progress is reflected in her works. Race-consciousness makes her proud of her Black heritage. She calls herself “an american Black” (*Prosaic* 424), where “american” is the adjective and “Black” is the noun. She wants the Black community to break away from the mean treatment meted out to them by the mainstream. Giovanni says in the poem “The True Import of Present Dialogue, Black vs. Negro”, “Can we learn to kill WHITE for BLACK / Learn to kill niggers / Learn to be Black men” (*Collected Poetry* 20). What she tries to imply is that if a loving, tolerant world to include Black people was not possible then Black men should react. And “If the Black Revolution passes you bye (sic) it’s for damned/ sure/ the wh-ite reaction to it won’t” (“Poem”, *Collected Poetry* 23). She is too individualistic at a time when Black community is moving towards the mass imitating no one in particular, yet representing her resistance in her works.

Giovanni never tires of the revolutionary dreams that she lives in her everyday life and the pride she feels in Black heritage which she expresses through her words. She is a strong advocate for individual dignity and individualism. Her love for her family members and her deep bond with them is an assertion of her Black values. “People, in

their kindness, want to say what a wonderful thing I did to give up my home and independence to go back to my parents' home, but the wonderful thing for me was that two people I have known and loved needed me and I needed them" (*Prosaic* 496). She mixes her sense of responsibility with individuality. She is an unwed mother who gives her son her family name. In her own subtle way she speaks of sexism and racism through her life and texts. For a proper understanding of her texts there is the need to know her life which is revealed in her autobiographical works. A healthy atmosphere at home and close-knit family ties enable Giovanni to have a healthy attitude to life. But the sexism she witnesses all around and America's racism make her rebel against established norms.

Giovanni lived in an area largely populated by Blacks. And American Blacks were the first to feel and fight for their human rights. Though history tells her that Blacks were ill treated, she has been fortunate enough not to experience much of this kind of marginalisation personally. But the young Nikki lets this linger in her subconscious and grows up a radical and a revolutionary but mellows with age. Her works reflect the dependency of white women on Black women. She reveals the plight of the Black woman who feels cheated when her male counterpart is fooled by white woman's beauty. She describes the ill treatment women suffer when Black males are belittled not just by white men but also by white women. That is why she says, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of civilizing white people" (*Prosaic* 427). She speaks of two important things – power and love. Her role is of spokeswoman for her kind. It is a general rule that when one conforms there is death of truth. And minority writers do not just want to be part of a human mass. They speak their own personal voice relegating the communal voice. These writers of ethnic identity under study, by and large, want to move

away from the community and speak in the personal voice and that makes for new articulations. They speak in a voice that is their own which is highly individualistic. She mentions one colourful world of global citizenship in “Poem” (for Nina):

gold fish will make love
to Black mollies and colour my world Black Gold
the vines entwining my windows will grow butterflies
and yellow jackets will buzz me to sleep [. . .] (*Collected Poetry* 175)

The ethnic has to cross from the oral to the written and from the regional to fractured English. They do not want to be part of a community that limits. While finding her voice in a multicultural society Giovanni has to move from the communal voice to the personal voice.

Giovanni feels homeless because of the discriminatory ways of the American mainstream. Black Americans are a race forced to live amidst their enslavers. Their heritage is African and their home is America. Giovanni says, “We were, however, the first slaves who chose, after freedom, to live among our enslavers” (*Prosaic* 426). The whole world acknowledges the contributions of Blacks to America in the area of sports, music, work force, culture and population. Giovanni has learnt that love is the basis of all relationships. And she wishes to connect through her texts not just to Americans but the world. She feels that if she does not do this Black experience will be erased. And she has learnt from her family that she is the master of her fate. She begins thinking of suffering people instead of remaining in the cocoon of her personal comforts, and breaks out of it. This change of paradigm results in a new voice to voice the suffering of the Blacks.

Paula Gunn Allen, a Native Indian was born in 1939, in Cubero, New Mexico. Her mother was of Laguna pueblo, Sioux, Scottish descent. Her father was a Lebanese official. She was brought up on a Spanish land grant. When the whites infiltrated officially on to the Albuquerque soil many women became victims of physical colonization. But all these Indian women though “half-breeds” accepted only their matrilineal Indian descent. Allen’s multicultural descent makes it difficult to categorise her into any community. But her openness of belonging to the Indian Sioux Laguna tribe indicates her matrilineal lineage.

These mixed origins and colonization are the major reasons for Allen’s writing. She writes about her identity as a woman and as a lesbian in Laguna and white society. She frequently examines the quest for spiritual wholeness. Allen is preoccupied with making the world aware of the rich Native Indian tradition especially when compared with the mainstream. She feels indignant that European settlers have robbed her of land and home, and dictate terms too. Allen works to articulate her sense of the tribal. Through her classes and talks she makes one aware of how rich Laguna culture is when compared with the mainstream. She tries to recover the lost glory of the Lagunas. The Lagunas love learning and live a high standard of life. The mainstream may appear very progressive but is actually regressive, according to Allen.

Allen as a Native American writer sees America as her natural home. The mainstream has robbed Indians of land, and forced them to acculturate and cleverly erased their culture. They suffer from a sense of loss of land, cultural values and traditions. Allen does not approve of the mainstream stereotypes of an Indian. The “half-

breeds” like Allen who have survived feel alienated, and therefore, assert their native Indian identity strongly.

Allen articulates a new relationship of man with land that stems from her Laguna gynosophic heritage. She articulates tribal consciousness in an American language and reconstructs new American perspectives from her Laguna wisdom. Allen explains in *The Sacred Hoop*: “[. . .] my method is somewhat western and somewhat Indian; I draw from each, and in the end I often wind up with a reasonably accurate picture of truth” (7). This model of a new relationship of man with land and environment for America is remapped and renegotiated from a gendered and geopolitical view of Euro-Americans. On being asked by Annie O. Eysturoy about the influence of landscape in shaping her perceptions Allen says:

I look at the natural world to see what something in the human world means, because I have no other way of knowing. The natural world might mean inside my body, but even then I will check with the world out there, the planet, the climate, the seasons, how plants function, how the earthy people function. Then I know how I am functioning, because I am an earthy person. (16)

The animism of Allen’s Laguna heritage has been labelled heathen by the mainstream. Allen realizes Christianity of America is geo-political and narcissistic, and that her Indian culture has something more profound to say. Writing in English Allen wants to preserve her Laguna culture and writes for a wide readership. She retells myths and stories of her culture. She resists the portrayal of Indians as “noble savages” and

reveals through her works the lofty ideals, values and belief systems of their tribe and their love for the environment.

On being a half-breed her sense of not belonging hurts, and alienation persists. Gender is a social construct, and what ethnic minorities portray is how gender systems change across cultural boundaries. Writers of ethnic identity are able to see through the barriers of gender, race, class, education and language, and look at life logically and wholistically. Crossing all boundaries they visualize one sisterhood of rainbow coloured writers. For Allen it is the West that has degraded the female tribal status. And the mainstream's dehumanization of the native people as a whole in American history is responsible for the break up of tribal unity and identity. "The Sacred Hoop" meant "enwholment" (Karvar15) according to Allen, meaning recovering this feeling of wholeness by tracing a sense of belonging. For Native American writers, the tribe or clan is more important than the individual. Ethnic writers write a lot about the family because they do not separate themselves from the family. In an interview with Annie Eysturoy, Allen says:

I think that Indian writers, Chicano writers and black and Asian American writers do a lot of family stuff, because we don't distinguish ourselves from the family base. We exist within the matrix of the people who are our relatives or family friends, or our tribe. I'm raised that way, and I can't write any other way. It may seem this is too peculiar, too local, too personal and not universal. But that's not true, because everybody has a human part that is about their connections, their blood-ties. To me my

work has to speak back to the people from whom it comes, if it comes through my voice, my mind, and my art. (Eysturoy 16)

Chicano writers including Allen, write and speak in English. But what they speak is something different from what the accepted majority would expect. She asserts her Indian identity and advanced ideologies which contrast with those of the mainstream.

In spite of the ethnic status, Kingston, Allen, Levertov and Giovanni share their response to social events in a unique way. They wish to insulate themselves from the mainstream's corrupting influence. Levertov is socially committed and her Jewish-Christian heritage makes her religiously incarnationalist and politically communitarian and socialist. Communitarian is the opposite of individualist. It assumes and works for a just and compassionate society for all. Christian morality is based on the notion of the individual in a community of other individuals. Levertov's positions are her commitment to peace, her ecological concern, her communitarian politics, and her sense of the sacredness of creation – as proceeding from her religious sense of life, specifically from her Hasidic-Christian roots.

Giovanni has an "Afrocentric" perspective. This would include a desire to forward the interests of the Black community over the interests of the individual; a deep sense of kinship with other Blacks; a pervasive sense of spirituality; and a deep pride in Black music, folk culture, cuisine and history. She has a real commitment to her people and to the institutions that are working towards the liberation of Black people. Black women have traditionally been active in the American workplace, and have therefore accepted a great deal of responsibility for their family's economic security. Throughout the history of Black American writing one finds a powerful sense of African values, from

the times of the slaves to the present. As a responsible Black American she says in

“Concerning One Responsible Negro with Too Much Power”:

it's very sad
 i'd normally stop and cry
 but evening is coming
 and I've got to negotiate
 for my people's freedom [. . .] (*Collected Poetry* 48)

As a responsible writer she feels she is to fight for her people. She has contemplated on the meaning of the existence of her race. She is aware that her people are not the first slaves or chattels, which means that their experience of suffering has a purpose. Slaves can hope and fight for freedom and eventually achieve it. That is exactly what the Blacks did. They set examples and pave the way for others to fight for their own freedom.

Allen is a staunch advocate for the preservation of Native American culture. She does not wish it to be tarnished by the mainstream. She says that women are producers and preservers of culture. She resists traditional Native American culture being erased, and fights against this. Allen writes to defy erasure and to preserve culture. In “Recuerdo” which means recovering, she reflects on her memories. She wants to go back and put together her memories of a tribal past from her tribal consciousness which she is obsessed with. She reveals a breed's memory and a breed's hope no longer warmed by family campfires she misses. She realizes her mission since nothing is left behind of an old lost culture. So, she maintains and preserves parts of her culture, and reveals this in her works. She says:

Tomorrow I will go back and climb the endless mesas
of my home. I will seek thistles drying in the wind,
pocket bright bits of obsidian and fragments
old potters left behind. (*Shadow Country* 106)

She wants to trace the Native American experience before a wider audience. But one understands only the fractured meaning within her works. Allen reflects the myths, folklore and the rich cultural traditions. Even in the myths one can see the significant role women played in Laguna cultural life.

Kingston believes that women have a major role to play in society unlike traditional women in her community. She keeps women on a pedestal to be role models for humanity. She subverts gender roles most effectively as seen in *The Woman Warrior* to show that her gender values have changed after exposure to the American way of life because she learns to assert herself with confidence. At first she imagines herself as a swordswoman, “If I took the sword, which hate must surely have forged out of the air, and gutted him, I would put color and wrinkles into his shirt” (*Woman Warrior* 49). She has a commitment to reveal her new identity through her articulations. She proves through *The Woman Warrior* that women are warriors at all levels and can do even the impossible. It is a craving to be free from the pull of dualities that makes ethnic writers socially committed. Today Kingston is a word warrior advocating peace. Hers is more than a racial opposition because there is a felt need to transcend all pettiness for global peace and to elevate the position of women. Her community’s narrowness and America’s pettiness have made her articulate a new relationship with the world, at a level of

tolerance, peace and adjustment. She becomes a visionary writer teaching war-like America the need for peace through ethnic myths.

All the four writers believe in freedom, but only Kingston, Giovanni, and Levertov wish to free themselves from their retarding cultures. In the case of Allen there is a wish to seize her Native Laguna culture from being tarnished by the mainstream influences. They all wish to insulate themselves from the corrupting influences of American value systems too.

Giovanni is very individualistic, and yet she never feels she is not free. When sexist and ethnocentric gibes come her way she does not allow this to get under her skin since all her life she has heard this, and it has had a bad effect on her perception of life. But when she grows up she realizes that only if these comments affect one will one not move forward. So she remains indifferent to these. For her the Blacks are the first slaves to struggle and achieve freedom and to live amidst the same people who made them suffer. Her cry for revolution has ignited in her people a wish to gain freedom at any cost. As she says in “A Litany for Peppe”:

And to you my Black boy

A Revolution

My gift of love

Blessed he who kills

For he shall control this earth. (*Collected Poetry* 52)

Kingston’s American education taught her values like freedom, equality, and individuality. She is not supposed to express herself as per Chinese norms. Though she likes her mother and her Chinese ancestry, she rejects stereotypes. She can bear this

silence no longer since it is interpreted as submissiveness by the mainstream. She decides to express herself freely, and so speaks her mind freely.

For Levertov her desire for freedom is a spiritual one. She longs to combine Jewish mysticism with contemporary every day life to make both “authentic”. Ralph J. Mills Jr. remarks, “Levertov’s primary intention as a poet has not been the statement of visionary experiences but rather the dogged probing of all routine business of life in search of what she calls the “authentic” in its rhythms and its details [. . .]” (243). As a mature individual she does not feel culture should restrict but give an individual a broader, more tolerant, a more balanced outlook and a keen eye to see the sacred in the mundane.

The marginalized are placed in a complicated field of power relations. They are nurtured in an environment of feeling cornered as “the other”. No institution or group is going to help them to wriggle out. American influences, exposure to English education, media, preachers, and inspiring leaders have helped them to decolonise the feminine mind. To feel that they could carve out a living according to their wishes is the revelation that has dawned on them. They strongly feel the power within them. They assert by speaking and writing. They have deformed a standard European tongue, and have reformed it into new literary forms, making possible, through literature, an international community. In the past they felt marginalized and on the fringes awaiting to ape and become civilized because of the bounty of the mainstream. And today they feel themselves to be new women articulating relationships from the subject positions they stand in. Today their thinking and bearing are different from those of the past. These four writers have undergone a paradigm shift that has changed their values, attitudes, belief

systems and their functioning in society. They articulate boldly the changes both in their personal life and their relationships with their community and with the mainstream.

The hypothesis of this study is that there is a very visible paradigm shift in the lives of the ethnic groups represented by these four authors owing to a radical change in the perceptions, approaches and attitudes of these authors – the way they look at their own personal experiences and those of their ethnic community. As a result of this new understanding of their reality and the difference in their outlook there are new articulations of relationships. This is being attempted to be established in the following chapters of the thesis.

This study is partly interdisciplinary, and makes use of concepts from Sociology, as well as those from Post-Colonialism, Culture Studies and Feminism to analyse the primary material and to arrive at subsequent conclusions. The secondary sources are used for elucidation of ideas and the reinforcement of the findings.

CHAPTER II

ETHNICITY: THE MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men [. . .] in the islands of the sea.

– W.E.B. Dubois, *In The Souls of Black Folk*

Maxine Hong Kingston, Nikki Giovanni, Paula Gunn Allen and Denise Levertov symbolize changes and even transformations of the socio-cultural variety. These changes are explored from the angle of marginalisation and minoritisation since they carry the heavy baggage of their respective cultural identities marked by their ethnic belief systems, values and perspectives on life. American society is a conglomeration of people of different colours, languages, pasts and thought processes. Its political constitution on the one hand and the history of immigration on the other, pioneered the establishment of a multi-ethnic or multicultural society.

Each ethnic American manifests his cultural ethos consciously or unconsciously in many ways. These Americans of ethnic identity seldom want to be acknowledged as a part of the white American identity. Traditions and values of their past, and experiences in the New World have made them etch for themselves a new ethnic American identity. In a more liberated and freedom loving American society, any behaviour that is un-American has been incorporated by the larger American society. The old world and the new world ideas mix, blend and coexist in contradictory patterns. This process of inclusion is called “ethnicization” (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 245) and the people emerging are called ethnic Americans.

Multiculturalism is an act of tolerance and maturity. It is respecting cultures and allowing them to peacefully coexist. But the word tolerance has a pejorative hint to it, hinting at the “them and us binaries”. So, if one is not broad-minded enough to tolerate ethnic minorities living side by side with the mainstream, ethnic traits become more visible as a part of assertion of presence. The term “ethnic American” is used by the mainstream to demarcate non-European identities from Eurocentric identities. In an individual, several forces – historical, cultural, social and psychological – contribute to the definition of his ethnicity. When the dominant culture marginalizes those who do not fit the norm, it results in the emergence of the ethnic. Ethnicity has had different meanings and implications in American culture. It is a term that first appeared in the 1972 *Supplement of the Oxford English Dictionary*. It found its way into the 1973 edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*. It is defined there as the condition of belonging to an ethnic group and ethnic pride. This sense of belonging is strong in Nikki Giovanni. Giovanni is proud of her Black ancestry. In the poem “My Tower” she says:

i have borne a nation on my heart
and my strength shall not be my undoing
cause this castle didn't crumble
and losing my pearl made me gain [. . .] (*My House* 45)

Though Blacks are minoritised, living amidst Whites, they become doubly aware of the cultural and moral values of being Black. Ethnicity also implies sameness or belonging to a group. *The International Encyclopedia of Sociology* opines:

Ethnicity refers to a sense of belonging and identification with a particular cultural heritage. Ethnic groups are socially defined on the basis of their

cultural characteristics. Members of ethnic groups consider themselves, and are considered by others to be part of a distinct culture or sub culture. These concepts help to explain the cultural diversity, which can occur in a given society. (“Ethnicity”473)

Belonging to an ethnic group is an experience, which is linguistic, cultural, religious, and racial.

Depending on the perspective or angle of viewing, ethnicity sometimes has a minoritizing and marginalizing implication. It refers to the cultural differences of immigrants as compared with the mainstream American culture. “[. . .] to many people, the term ethnicity connotes minority status, lower class, or migrancy” (qtd. in Sollors, “Theory of American Ethnicity” 282). Hence the persistent and perennial dilemma of the ethnic American is alienation. Paula Gunn Allen describes the alienated state she finds herself in, like other Native Americans, everywhere being suppressed. In her poem “Molly Brant, Iroquois Matron, Speaks” she describes her identity:

Still, let them obliterate it, I say.

What do I care? What have I to lose,

having lost all I loved so long ago?

Aliens, aliens everywhere [. . .] (*Skins and Bones* 12)

Allen is constantly regarded as alien because she is interrogated before being accepted into the national fabric and accepted only as a hyphenated American, however, which leads to the emergence of the “new ethnicity”.

Man prefers order to chaos. And so, for peaceful coexistence he copes with the differences as a high tolerance factor and also as a part of enriching himself through

exposure. Werner Sollors in *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* thinks along similar lines (60) supporting the passage from the Bible: “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth [. . .]” (*Holy Bible*, Acts 17.26). When one stops thinking with this broadminded view, all kinds of differences loom large and result in utter chaos. The need for ethnic assertion itself is to counteract the mainstream’s attempt to efface ethnic cultures. Nikki Giovanni observes the mainstream’s attempt to divide the world based on colour. She says: “The world does not move on ideologies; it moves not even on interests, because it would be to the interest of some whites to unite with us. It moves on color. And that must be understood” (*Prosaic* 105). In 1977 Mario Cuomo, the mayor of New York said: “our strength is not in melting together but in keeping our cultures” (Chametzky 9). Ethnicity is marked by differences and distinctions and, yet there are common features. The existence of different ethnic and cultural groups within societies is widespread and ancient. This is observed when one traces the arrival of immigrants and how they have assimilated and yet maintained their cultural diversity.

The first immigrants to America were the white settlers from Europe. The most dominant European group was that of Britain who effectively prevented the occupation of the New World by others. Later there was piecemeal immigration from different other European countries, and then the Jews and the Chinese came. The Africans were bought and brought exclusively for the purpose of running the plantations. Giovanni says that immigrants did not come to the New World in a cruise ship:

They all came because they had to. They were poor, hungry, criminal,
persecuted individuals, who would rather chance dropping off the ends of

the earth than stay inert knowing both their body and spirit were slowly having the life squeezed from them. Whether it was a European booking passage on a boat, a slave chained to a ship, a wagon covered with a sailcloth, they all headed toward the unknown with all nonessentials stripped away. (*Prosaic* 373)

Immigrants came as slaves, job seekers, skilled labourers, and sometimes because of religion and for wealth. The process of immigration continues with thousands from the Asian continent and elsewhere reaching the U.S. and settling there.

The newcomer came as a settler, and had to establish his economic self-sufficiency. He was suspended between the new home and his homeland. He was caught by a feeling of being stripped of ethnic authenticity and purity by a new language, new experiences. As a result, the migrant has a syncretic identity. Immigrants today have acculturated themselves by learning the English language and imitating the American born in customs, manners and ways of life. This gives rise to a new lower middle class who represent the general American values, but are hybrids. Sabine I. Golz in her article “How Ethnic I am” says, “Ethnicity is transformed from something one is into something one does” (Golz 48). And these hybrids continue to change. Giovanni agrees to this, saying, “The culture of a people is an expression of its life style” (*Prosaic* 117). In whichever part of the world a Black man is, he has African roots, so is the case of his children and their children too. And none of these people would have seen Africa but “will retain and manifest this African way” (*Prosaic* 117). Werner Sollors shares this opinion too in his Introduction to *The Invention of Ethnicity* stating that ethnicity “is not a thing but a process” (xv), and all that one does is one’s ethnic self. So along with what

they are the immigrants continuously alter and adjust to the new life in the new country. The immigrant goes through a stage of adjustment which is difficult. Racial or cultural differences create divisions at the experiential level. The differences are absorbed to some extent by the dynamics of assimilation. But there is a residue of differences that surface on occasions. So, one notices that the process of assimilation is fraught with opposition and recalcitrance. When it dawns on them that nothing can prevent them from being labelled by the mainstream they decide to react and inspire their respective ethnic groups to assert their ethnicity.

Slowly the immigrant, through the transitional stage, begins to assert his differences. Giovanni in “Ego-tripping” states that she is proud of her Blackness:

I was born in the Congo
 I walked to the fertile crescent and built
 the sphinx
 I designed a pyramid so tough that a star
 that only glows every one hundred years falls
 into the center giving divine perfect light
 I am bad [. . .] (*Ego-tripping* 3)

The sarcasm built into the statement speaks volumes about the concrete achievements of her race despite degradation at the hands of the Whites. White civilization regards Blacks as bad yet Giovanni is proud of her Black achievements. To counter the representation of them by the mainstream Allen in her Preface to the *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women* says:

When the President of the United States can publicly denounce us, call our ancient and valued life ways “primitive” and state that whites “shouldn’t have let Indians maintain their primitive ways”, the exact nature of our predicament becomes very clear. Although it is 1989 and not 1888 our situation vis-à-vis the civilization around us has changed little. We are here to testify that our traditions are valuable to us, and that we continue to resist obliteration either of our cultures or our personhood. (2)

Representing the minority in derogatory terms is a technique employed by the mainstream to erase minority cultures. Giovanni says in *The Prosaic Soul of Nikki Giovanni*: “Literature is one of the tools white people have used for survival” (120). They have described the Blacks as lazy and having a choice of migrating for slavery which, she says, is not true. The mainstream thinks only what it can gain for itself in the form of wealth, property or benefits. In “Gemini” she says, “Our laws were people-directed; the only don’t was, don’t kill anyone unless your tribe or community was at war. Whites’ laws were property-directed; they made people property even before they had us” (*Prosaic* 120-21). The culture of accommodation and non-violence shines in contradistinction with the culture of death and annihilation. This is all the more reason for the ethnic minority to hold fast to their belief system despite the fact that they have been fighting a losing battle. “Still today if you go to a Black’s house, even if he has very little, he’ll share and be insulted if you refuse. [. . .] wherever you find Black people they share and say to hell with tomorrow” (*Prosaic* 121). The attitudinal change of the minorities is symptomatic of the highly obvious paradigm shift which crystallizes in the form of radical changes. The hitherto recognised groups, through their writings, again are

becoming strident in demanding new relationships based on the sound values of human equality, self respect, personal dignity and the essential humanity of everyone. The radicalization of the new articulations could be traced back to the powerful writings of Kingston, Giovanni, Levertov and Allen. The only difference is, unlike their predecessors, they refuse to stay on the borderlines but forge ahead to the centre. They resist mainstream's definition, and redefine themselves regarding the mainstream as "other". Hence the importance of binary oppositions to define the self is observed. In the wake of the paradigm shift radical changes occur starting with attitudinal changes. What happens because of paradigm shifts are the resulting literary texts. Their writing leads to conscientising and a new awareness followed by attitudinal changes. Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen are agents of social fermentations. They transmit new ideas, perspectives and goals to the ethnic minorities. The result is a deep kind of awareness or conscientisation. Subsequent to this there is the inevitable paradigm shift starting with a radical change in attitudes leading to new articulation of relationships based on widely accepted and inviolable, if not sacred, human values – like the essential equality of human persons despite differences in colour and culture. This trend is not confined to any specific society. It is endemic, spreading far and wide, making strides across continents in our time. The prognosis is that this trend of ethnic assertion is sure to be conspicuous in the lives of most races, and is likely to be reflected in their respective literatures.

Emigration and immigration are both related to social, political and economic factors. In emigration there is always the "push" factor as well as the "pull" factor. The push factor comprises the painful realities of the home ground like religious persecution, poverty, social rejection and even criminal background. People leave to get away from

taxes, military indignities and constraints of the class system of society. Conversely, the pull factor is a compendium of attractions such as freedom, wealth and adventure. They are lured by the material wealth of the country they are emigrating to. Another motive could be migration through marriage. “In essence, the causes for emigration were food, freedom and faith – the lack of them at home and the hope for them abroad”

(*Encyclopedia Americana* 804).

Emigration to the New World was the “safety valve” for the expanding population of Europe suffering from its own density. “It was a global redistribution of man with fateful effects on both land of origin and lands of reception” (*Encyclopedia Americana* 805).

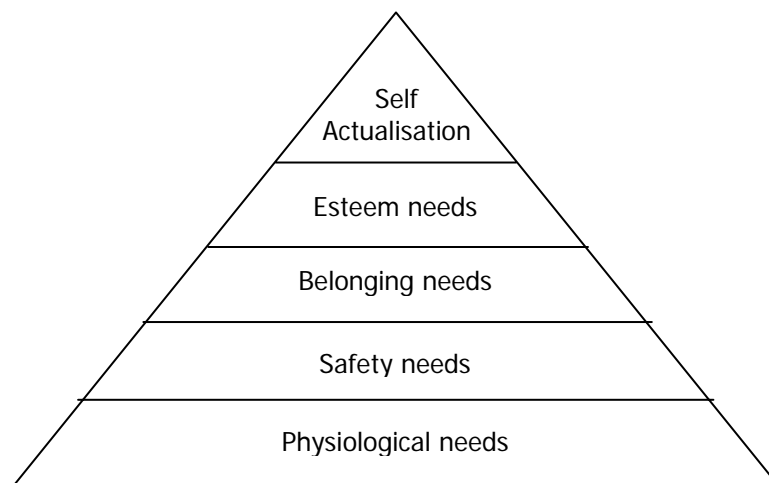
Today there is greater mobility across continents except in the case of China. This mobility is motivated by studies, jobs, visits and other purposes. Yet the net result is a pack of problems and benefits emanating from ethnicity. This involves a whole range of human emotions and motives. From one angle ethnic struggles and wars appear to be menacing to human co-existence. From another angle what is to be perceived is the great human blend based on cooperation, mutual support, cultural give and take and a style of life marked by geniality and joyful rewards.

Emigration and immigration are universal phenomena for trade, political reasons, and owing to social pressures but initially never with the intention of selling ethnicity or ethnic values. The phenomenon varies from century to century. For monetary reasons, for social status and upward mobility, for fulfilling one’s dreams and for psychological needs people leave their homes and lands. The sociological interest in ethnicity has derived

from the study of processes associated with immigration and the persistence of cultural distinctiveness among immigrants.

The immigrant comes to a new land, and confronts another culture, and faces a cultural shock and a cultural dislocation. His world order is completely changed. Literary creativity at this time is at its minimal level. A man can think of creativity only after fulfilling his basic needs.

According to Harold Maslow people strive to reach the highest levels of their capabilities. Maslow has devised a hierarchical theory of needs with the most basic needs at the bottom. Each level of the hierarchy is dependent on meeting the needs of the previous level. When the immigrant comes he needs to sustain his life by fulfilling his physiological needs. Then he looks for his safety and security. On the next rung of the ladder of needs is the belonging need. When safety needs are met, one searches for love, friendship and a sense of community. If the last four needs are not fully realized then one will search for the same and will be motivated to fulfill these needs. Maslow calls them “deficit” needs or “D” needs.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

These needs are essentially survival needs. The essence of Maslow's theory is that everyone, within their capability, will strive to improve themselves and their situation. And intentions to improve are for the good and benefit of society in general and should be encouraged.

Applying Maslow's theory to the immigrants, it can be seen that an ethnic can think of asserting his uniqueness only after the fulfilment of the needs at each level. If one does not have enough of something, it is bound to tell on one's behaviour. Hence for survival these needs are important, or else the ethnic will be living under stressful conditions. The immigrant first cries for his basic necessities. And then he needs the fulfilment of emotional needs as illustrated by Giovanni in "Straight Talk":

i'm Black not only
because it's beautiful but because it's me
and i can be dumb and old and petty and ugly
and jealous but i still need love [. . .] (*My House* 32)

When one's primary needs are satisfied one has time to be creative. Besides, the need to be creative is also to be compelled for creativity to usher forth.

Kingston, Giovanni, Levertov and Allen move ahead with the times though they fear that every trace of their cultural past will be wiped out. They follow the middle path between being ethnic and being American. Yet there is a love-hate relationship with reference to the mainstream. In the poem "Dear World" Allen says:

A halfbreed woman
can hardly do anything else
but attack herself,

her blood attacks itself. (*Skins and Bones* 56)

Being part of the mainstream she experiences alienation from the tribe. And this reversed sense of belonging to the tribe is essential to experience wholeness. Hating American culture for its lack of emotional ties and bonds, but loving it for its advocacy of individualism and the conscious effort of Americans to get on in the world and make it big, is what stands out in the minds of the immigrants.

To carve a niche for themselves and to reflect their unique identity are their only aims. An individual gains identity only when he rubs shoulders with others. He enriches himself through exposure and contact with others, and starts thinking of things from other's point of view. The writer of ethnic identity is enslaved by his cultural past and enslaves the white American, believing that the ethnic is not just American, but ethnic American, the hyphenated American who partakes of two cultures resulting in a reinforced identity with the added strength of hybridity.

The American culture has enslaved the immigrant by its power and might, yet the ethnic American uses English to enslave the mainstream American to accept his difference and benchmark a space for himself. In her poem "The Text is Flesh", Allen says: "Idiom is the language of the heart" (*Life is a Fatal Disease* 144). And all ethnics express this feeling of hybridity. Ethnic identity therefore is a composite self-image created out of all the contrasts. Migrant writers experience for themselves the cultural mimicry produced by the mainstream domination. They are bracketed together under one umbrella because of their hybridity. Through their works one learns how their cultures have continued flamboyantly to mix and mingle with one and another. Despite all the differences the ethnics belong very much to the American social fabric.

For an immigrant, his existence and survival are more important than his identity. The ethnic is conscious of himself as a full-fledged being. As Jean Paul Sartre said, for the ethnic as for others his “existence precedes his essence”. He is anxious of his survival. When his basic needs are unfulfilled he plunges into despair. In an alien land he senses the might of the dominant culture, and is afraid of succumbing or total annihilation. Giovanni says: “We work too hard; get paid too little; and nobody gives a damn. But that’s no reason to give up and blame anyone else. That’s the real world” (*Prosaic* 333). Over a long period assimilation and acculturation take place, to a certain extent, but the ethnic does not give up his rich cultural tradition. The duality within makes him search for an identity. This twoness of being ethnic and American has come to stay within him.

For the ethnic his dualism comes to be the absolute certainty which he believes in. This belief is a springboard for him to believe in himself and launch into personal achievement. According to Lavine, Heidegger and Sartre opine: “as conscious being I live in a life-world into which I feel myself to be absurdly thrown, a world in which I find that as conscious being I alone provide its meaning and values; and my life is lived in anguish and despair” (qtd. in Lavine 396). To understand human individuals, it is not enough to study their behavior alone but also to understand their ways of perceiving the world.

Ethnic Americans stress on their individuality, and this is a blessing in disguise and a contrast to the mainstream American’s attempt to keep the ethnic at arm’s length. America, today, is composed of heterogeneous ethnic groups. They have conglomerated on account of major factors – the extending of their own frontiers, rise of mass society,

unique pattern of national crisis and collective experiences as evidenced in the writings of many ethnic authors. The rise of a mass society was the rise of a middle class who opted for values of self-reliance, individualism and equality.

Ethnicity gets defined in terms of prolonged interactions between the immigrants' backlog and the new-found social milieu as exemplified in the writings of Kingston, Giovanni, Levertov and Allen. An illustration of this may now be attempted. For the first generation immigrant home meant not America. Kingston says: "Whenever my parents said 'home', they suspended America" (*Woman Warrior* 99). Kingston never wants to go back because she is afraid of being enslaved. Kingston says: "Among the sellers with their ropes, cages, and water tanks were the sellers of little girls" (*Woman Warrior* 79). It is accepted that girls failed if they "grew up to be but wives and slaves" (*Woman Warrior* 19). It was customary in China to sell young girls as slaves. Kingston's feelings are reflected in her statement: "In China my parents would sell my sister and me. My father would marry two or three more wives, who would splatter cooking oil on our bare toes and lie that we were crying for naughtiness" (*Woman Warrior* 99). One observes that on one hand she wishes to stay away from Chinese norms and on the other hand she is attracted to American beliefs like individualism, freedom and equality.

The White-Indian conflict was between blood knowledge and brain knowledge. It was fortunate for the white settlers that the Indians were few and backward in ammunition to be a grave impediment to colonization. The colonizer hated the colonized and the American Indians were not prepared for it. Allen illustrates this in her poem "Molly Brant, Iroquois Matron, Speaks":

We had not counted on their hate;

we had not recognized
 the depth of their contempt.
 How could we know I would be
 no longer honored matron
 but heathen squaw [. . .] (*Skins and Bones* 10)

The paradigm shift is concomitant upon the new generations owing to their improved perception of their own community and the mainstream.

Ethnicity is generally perceived as a label for easy identification. But ethnicity is not a condition of stasis; it is something very dynamic in nature. In a cultural context of plurality ethnicity must be a dynamic condition marked by a constant dialogue with the mainstream. And ethnicity can survive only by remaining dynamic. Anyone will have an intrinsic need to assert differences. So Kingston, Giovanni, Levertov and Allen are consolidating ethnicity by preserving it as an act of resisting First World hegemony. Michael Fischer says in “Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory”: “Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned; it is something dynamic, often unsuccessfully repressed or avoided” (195). The ethnic in his new circumstance could be found redefining himself in terms of his experiences. His duality results in changed perspectives and an altered ethnicity which changes with each generation. He grows and develops as a person with multiple possibilities for vertical mobility. Thus the ethnic variety of the American society adds not just colour but vigour and strength to its composite identity. The resultant process is an endless enrichment of the entire social scenario. The largest racial minorities in the U.S. include American Indians, Black Americans, Jewish Americans and Chinese Americans.

The Native Americans helped the early settlers to survive since the immigrants lacked the necessary skills of survival. Allen in her poem “Pocahontas to her English husband, John Rolfe” expresses that Pocahontas was kind to John Rolfe just as Indians were helpful to the immigrants. She says:

Had I not cradled you in my arms
 oh beloved perfidious one,
 you would have died.
 And how many times did I pluck you
 from certain death in the wilderness –
 my world through which you stumbled
 as though blind? (*Skins and Bones* 8)

The Native Indians are looked on as noble savages with barbaric customs speaking strange languages and are labelled spiritualists. In fact, it was the confrontation between the European and the American Indian that led to the culture, philosophy and literature that one calls American.

The Indian civilization was divided into several tribes. They lived a community life, “honoring propriety in those relationships” (Allen, *Spider* 9). For them the tribe was more important than the individual. This was not so for the white mainstream. The White man found a reason to mask his exploitation of the Indians and to marginalize him. The concept of “manifest destiny” made the Americans feel superior. The colonizer was more an outsider and the Native Indian authentically the American.

A search for land, money and market by the mainstream ended in a steady decrease in the Native Indian population because of smallpox brought by the Whites and

partly as a result of slaughter by the Whites. The white explorers found the native Indians non-literate, who hunted and gathered food. Aware of the Native Indian backwardness and having gained footing in the American soil, the Anglo American felt he could find his own way without Native Indian help. Allen refutes this in her poem “The One Who Skins Cats” saying:

I led the whitemen into the wilderness and back,
and they survived the journey with my care.

It’s true they came like barbarian hordes
after that, and that the Indian lost our place.

We was (sic) losing it anyway. (*Skins and Bones* 18)

Everything was done to weaken the Native Indians. Early American settlers used Native Indians as slaves. Some Native Indians were successful at escaping and making their way through the woods. By 1700 the Black slaves were being brought in, but the Whites feared that these new slaves might join forces with the Indians. So they followed the divide and rule system. They tried to prevent contact between Indians and Blacks. They used Black slaves as soldiers against the Indians and hired Indians to track down runaway slaves. The Whites were smart enough to play one ethnic group against another.

First World’s attempt to efface ethnic American identity is obvious. And being a political and cultural construct it remains highly diffuse and vulnerable to interrogation. Ethnic Americans were victimized only because they were not Whites and not part of the Eurocentric White race.

In 1871 the Congress decided that no Indian tribe should be recognized indicating the height of ethnic repression. They stopped recognizing the group as a separate entity.

The whites trespassed on Native Indian land and said that the Natives did not exist. This was bulldozing over the ethnic culture of the Native Indians. The Whites were backed by superior military power. So, modern American history is a history of repression of Native Indians bordering on extermination. As a result Indians are the poorest ethnic group in America. They are poorly educated, plagued by many diseases, and many of them are alcoholics, and face the problem of unemployment. They are deprived of good jobs and upward social mobility. Their children are sent to boarding schools and forbidden to use Indian language or dress. Allen says:

Children who resist this intense, compulsory indoctrination are punished in a variety of ways; flunked out, forced out (or graduated illiterate in a society that requires literacy as the price of dinner), shamed, coerced beaten, put in tiny cells in late-spring and early fall heat or winter cold, denied, discounted, and thrown away, as though human beings were yesterday's leavings. (*Spider* 15)

Education is a primary tool of conquest. The young of the land are taught to view the world only through Protestant, purist, and Anglo-American eyes. Allen says: "Intellectual apartheid of this nature helps create and maintain political apartheid; it tends to manifest itself in the practical affairs of all societies that subscribe to it" (*Spider* 3). The government policy kept on changing. By 1933 it was obvious that the Indians were resisting the pressure to adopt White ways. Allen says: "Like our sisters who resist in other ways, we Indian women who write have articulated and rendered the experience of being in a state of war for five hundred years. While non-Indians are largely unconscious of this struggle, we cannot afford that luxury" (*Spider* 2). Despite legal protection given

to them the American Indians remain still largely marginalised at the social level where enculturation is only a mirage. The American Indian believes and asserts the view that all Americans except Indians are immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. And Native Americans are the original owners of the American land, and yet they are minoritized, marginalised, and have suffered immensely at the hands of the mainstream Anglo-Americans. Joseph F. Healey says: “[. . .] Native Americans on the reservations were subjected to a policy of coercive acculturation or forced Americanization” (147). By the time of the first European immigration to America in the late fifteenth century the Native Americans had spread into their own geographic environments. Sociologist Donald Noel has developed a hypothesis that helps to explain how the contact situation between dominant and minority groups shapes all subsequent relationships. A similar contact situation was also analysed by Sociologist Robert Blauner. Healey says:

From the standpoint of the Noel and Blauner hypotheses, Native Americans have had to struggle from their origins as a conquered and colonized minority group. For most of this century, they have been left to survive as best they could at the margins of the larger society, too powerless to establish meaningful pluralism yet too colonized to pursue equality. (167)

Native Americans have been considerably more successful than African Americans in preserving their traditional culture. Today the Native Americans, after a long period of neglect, are re-asserting themselves.

The U.S. has the second largest population of African origin in the world. And they have long been treated as primitives or second-class citizens except constitutionally.

The treatment of the Afro-American is a testimony of the sad failure of this statutory protection. Yet the Blacks have been loyal to the mainstream. Nikki Giovanni in “Not Just Truman’s Baby” says:

Not from 1619 to this very day . . . have Black men and women
declined to serve . . . and honor a flag . . . a nation . . . an idea . . . that
still rebukes them [. . .] (*Blues* 22)

The oppression of the Blacks has a long and painful history. According to the Blauner hypothesis the colonized groups, like the Blacks and Native Indians, had a more difficult time than immigrants like the Asians. The Blacks fell into the colonized category; their masters owned them as slaves for life. The Noel hypothesis explains why the colonists chose the Blacks as slaves. Unlike the Reds who had relatives nearby and white indentured slaves who were considered superior to Blacks, the Blacks “had no bargaining power” (Healey 70). They had no nearby relatives, no idea of how to escape and no place to go to. Great tales of freedom, money and plenty baited them from their homeland. And the treatment meted out to them was dehumanizing. In *Quilting the Black Eyed-Pea* (2002), which Giovanni calls a collection of poems but not quite poems, she describes the sufferings of the slaves who were shipped:

The people who were captured and enslaved immediately
recognized the men who chained and whipped them and herded
them into ships so tightly packed there was no room to turn . . .
no privacy to respect . . . no tears to fall without landing on
another . . . were not kind and gentle and concerned for the state
of their souls . . . no . . . the men with whips and chains were

understood to be killers . . . feared to be cannibals . . . known
to be sexual predators . . . The captured knew they were in
trouble . . . in an unknown place . . . without communicable
abilities with a violent and capricious species . . . (3)

They were stripped off much of their African tribal heritage and many Black women were sexually exploited and kept with the sole purpose to breed more slaves. This is one of the reasons for the high rate of illegitimacy among the Afro-Americans. Michael Banton in *Race Relations* says: “From an early stage of their settlement in North America, practically all Negroes were restricted to a status of total subjugation, and even the abolition of slavery does not seem to have led to any very significant diminution of race feeling” (102-103). The mainstream racist attitudes and prejudices created social distances. When questioned, the mainstream blamed Blacks for their inferiority complex and of doing nothing to change their lot. This is a kind of modern racism where one boasts all are equal yet practises ethnocentrism. Racist views include that “most blacks just don’t have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty” (Healey 55). But Afro-Americans like Nikki Giovanni articulate the unvoiced. In her poem “On Seeing Black Journal and Watching Nine Negro Leaders Give Aid and Comfort to the Enemy “to Quote Richard Nixon” she says:

oh i hate the white man
i love the white man
and it’s just a natural fact
that one way or other if you stick around
he’ll get on your back [. . .] (*My House* 62)

Ethnic minorities have in spite of having legal protection, suffered greatly. And the tale of the Afro-American is full of woes and sufferings. There is a feeling that Africa was an area inhabited predominantly by primitives. The Black man was first called “Negro” communicating a very derogatory sense. Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* says: “As I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am the Negro” (197). There was a slow adoption of the term “black” in place of “Negro” identifying the Black slaves of America to these people. Black indicates a total contrast, of course, to white. So much of what it means to be black in America, is intricately linked to white society. Slowly the introduction of the reference to African origin was emphasized by the term Afro-American. As Frantz Fanon says in *Black Skin White Masks*: “but the first encounter with a white man oppresses him with the whole weight of his blackness” (150).

The centrality of Giovanni’s works is a combination of race and gender. In the poem, “But Since You Finally Asked” which was written to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the slave memorial at Mount Vernon, Giovanni recounts the history of African people brought to America in chains: “No one asked us . . . what we thought of James Town . . . in 1619 . . . they didn’t even say . . . ‘Welcome’ . . . ‘You’re Home’” (*Collected Poetry* 357). Their tale of untold suffering is only because of their racial differences. This built-in allergy the white mainstream had for the immigrants of African blood has no real solid reason. Yet to the American he is indispensable, because the Afro-American has proved to be head and shoulders above the American in several fields as in the plantations, in music, and athletics. One knows that the Black-White relations have been characterized by inequalities. The Ku Klux Klan radical, in its assertions, strived for

manifesting the African American identity. The immigrants experienced being pushed into the mainstream and being pulled out and away from the mainstream. Giovanni says in the poem “But Since You Finally Asked”:

[. . .] They just snatched
 our drums . . . separated us by language and gender . . . and put us
 on blocks . . . where our beauty . . . like our dignity . . . was
 ignored
 No one said a word . . . in 1776 . . . to us about Freedom. . . . The
 rebels wouldn’t pretend . . . the British lied . . . We kept to a
 space . . . where we owned our souls . . . since we understood . . .
 another century would pass . . . before we owned our bodies . . .
 But we raised our voices . . . in a mighty cry . . . to the Heavens
 above . . . for the strength to endure (*Collected Poetry* 357)

Inequalities have been prevalent in housing, schooling, politics, jobs, income, unemployment and poverty. And the lot of the Afro-American has been to make a choice whether they should struggle with or against these forces of assimilation. The Black immigrants along with the Native Indians have been always frowned upon. This kind of inequality leads ethnic writers to belong and identify with their own groups. Inequality always implies the gain of one group at the expense of the other. Every system of social stratification generates protest against its principles. Afro-Americans in the 1960s even changed their names to “Blacks” to establish that new assertion of distinctiveness. Nikki Giovanni opines in *The Collected Poems of Nikki Giovanni*:

[. . .] I like who we were . . . and who we are . . .

and since someone has asked . . . let me say: I am proud to be a Black American . . . I am proud that my people labored honestly . . . with forbearance and dignity . . . [. . .] (357)

The Africans have been forced into the process of assimilation. Yet they realize that it is not possible to completely wipe out the past, which is deeply ingrained in their psyche. So today Africans who have assimilated the American way of life are proclaiming their Afro-American identity since this duality is an intrinsic reality of multiple identities. *The Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism 1990* states:

Afro American culture is the symbolic material expression by black Americans of our relationship to nature, to our ethnic community, and to Whites as we seek to adapt to our environment in order to survive and thrive, both individually and collectively. (Coyle 138)

Alienated minority groups always want to reflect their identities. And there are many ethnic groups in America. The presence of so many groups is also the cause for several problems. Centuries of separate development have created a unique Afro-American Black experience in American society. The real structural assimilation of African Americans is low. Since the deep-seated feeling of the Americans that they are encountering an inferior race has always been there with them. In this connection it is worth remembering Frantz Fanon who says that to be identified as a Black is a complete dislocation. He says in *Black Skin White Masks* “What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage (sic) that splattered my whole body with black blood?” (112). One finds that the African experience along with the American scenario has had an overwhelming effect on the Afro-American. Hence instead of assimilating he

has asserted his difference. This is a protective defensive tactic. Not willing to swim with the current they go against it by organizing movements to support their cause. Giovanni says in “Africa II”:

and africa is a baby to be
 tossed about and disciplined and loved
 and neglected and bitten on it's bottom
 as i wanted to
 sink my teeth into his thigh
 and tell him he would never be
 clean until he can
 possess me [. . .] (*My House* 50)

Afro-Americans have realized that unless they put their feet down and stand up for their own rights, no one is going to give them their rights on a silver platter. Besides, discerning how much the American is exploiting him, the Afro-American has decided to take the bull by its horns and not let the American walk all over him. Giovanni makes an appeal to her people and at the same time hurls a warning at the mainstream in “the inaugural poem” saying, “[. . .] let's think about the new world we are borning and while we recognize we cannot repay the Indians nor the Blacks nor make whole again the Browns nor the Yellows we do not still think we should allow the whites to run roughshod over the rest of us [. . .] and that life decisions cannot always reside with those who can enforce their desires with physical strength” (*Blues* 29-30). One discovers that the collective unconscious of immigrants of African blood pushes to the forefront their African cultural heritage and their African experience which has long remained dormant

and suppressed. Though the immigrant is looked down on, he is to work out new concepts and transform himself into a new man. Rising like a phoenix out of the ashes of early writers, come the writers of the Black Arts movement of the sixties like Sonia Sanchez, and Nikki Giovanni projecting the complexity of their bicultural identity, music, tension between Euro centric and Afro centric aesthetic values, and a realistic evaluation of Black values. Giovanni realizing the contributions of the Blacks to the Whites says: “If white Americans think about it they owe us a lot. We kept the Constitution alive by constantly testing it” (*Prosaic* 198).

The Chinese were the first Asian immigrants to enter America. They started coming in from 1820. They came mainly as skilled labourers to work in laundries, railroads, as cleaning women in hotels and for minding children. They worked themselves to skin and bone, had poor nutritional food, poor hygiene and sanitation and often fell ill. Many died building the rail-roads. Kingston says: “They lost count of the number dead; there is no record of how many men died building the railroad. Or maybe it was demons doing the counting and chinamen not worth counting” (*China Men* 136). The kind of work they were made to do was humanly impossible. Kingston in *China Men* says: ““A human body can’t work like that. The demons don’t believe this is a human body. This is a china man’s body”” (137). The Chinese came to take part in the Californian Gold Rush. They came to escape the Revolution and for better prospects through illegal and legal means. Chinese restaurant owners are the descendants of railroad workers. In the American West, those who did not return to China found their opportunities limited by discriminatory laws. Most of them lived crowded together in San Francisco, doing laundry work or selling vegetables on the street.

Immigrants having left home maintained relationships with their families only through poems and letters they wrote each other. Some of them fell ill and lost their minds unable to bear the separation. Still others adopted some alternative to remain sane. They dug a hole in the earth and every time they yearned for home they would shout into the pit. As described by Kingston in *China Men*: “‘I want home’, Bak Goong yelled pressed against the soil, and smelling the earth ‘I want my home,’ the men yelled together. I want home. Home. Home. Home. Home” (116).

The urban Californian Chinese were close enough to one another to maintain their identity and traditions. They were a distinct community. Legal immigration stopped between 1882 and 1943. Illegal immigrants continued to arrive and as a result the Chinese community has been stable until recent years. Now and then violence erupted in their communities. The Chinese when they first came showed a willingness to work for low wages which later ignited violent conflict with white labourers which culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 being passed by which women were not allowed to immigrate. The white population showed their violent antagonism to them by the Chinese Exclusion Act. They prevented large-scale immigration of Chinese labourers to the U. S. and later excluded them from national citizenship.

The immigration from Europe included scores of different nationalities, cultures, and religious faiths. Many of these immigrants were Catholic or Jewish, and their religious differences were the focus of severe prejudice, discrimination and violent attacks in the U. S. Catholic and Jewish immigrants faced greater levels of rejection because of their religion.

The Jews in North America have descended from either Sephardic Jews who had lived in Spain and other Mediterranean countries for hundreds of years or the Ashkenazim who had lived in northern Europe and who resembled other northern European peoples. The earliest Jewish settlers in Northern America were a few Sephardic groups who came to the colonies in the seventeenth century. These families had left Spain during the Spanish Inquisition. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries most of the Jewish immigrants to North America were the Western Europeans. Immigration took place during the 1870s. Jewish population in Canada doubled. In 1881 Russian immigrants came and they were helped by their fellow Jews as best as they could. They had lived in isolated villages in Europe and so they had an orthodox culture, quite different from sophisticated Jews of Western Europe.

Upon coming to America Levertov finds the cultural/intellectual/art world in New York strongly Jewish. So Levertov does not experience any kind of personal marginalisation but empathises with those experiencing it with her own sense of loneliness which she expresses in the poem “The Long Way Round”:

I in America,
 white, an
 indistinguishable mixture
 Of Kelt and Semite, grown under glass
 [.]
 begin to learn,
 by Imagination's slow ferment,
 what it is to awaken

each day Black in White America [. . .] (*Life in the Forest* 53)

One notices that she experiences ideological differences with mainstream America. This crisis in her poetry comes with the Vietnam War and the need she feels to make her poetry engage political issues and become socially committed (didactic) rather than lyrical. She is concerned about racism in the Vietnam War period, when empathy with the Vietnamese teaches her about racism back home.

Ethnic identities are torn by their concept of belonging to a specific geographic space. Giovanni always feels she is a “we” poet whose works reflect the thoughts of others – the Black race. But she cannot be arrogant enough to say she is their mouthpiece. She is not wedded to traditions since she is too individualistic. Having lived in America she does not have a literal relationship with Africa but she tells Arlene Elder:

I really don't think I have a relationship with Africa. I think I have a relationship with my mother, son, a number of other things; I don't think I have a relationship with the continent. (Interview 62)

What Giovanni is trying to say is she does not have a firsthand experience of Africa, not having lived there. But the multitudes of Blacks in America, the slave ancestors, the recorded memory of suffering are deeply ingrained in her psyche. To an observer, she feels that whether she likes it or not her physical, racial identity comes before the sum total of her personal identity. Belonging refers to a boundary, and is also sociological and psychological. People who are similar belong to a group in a specific space, sharing a cultural heritage, language and biological similarities and values. Ethnic identities because of ethnocentrism feel alien in America. They experience the sense of not belonging to their own homeland on account of assimilation. Adding to it one always

traces oneself to an existence between geographical boundaries. Werner Sollors quotes Frederik Barth: “It is the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (qtd. in “Theory of American Ethnicity” 273). To preserve one’s culture one insulates oneself. Fredrik Barth argues in his *Introduction to Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* that boundaries are important criteria of membership and that boundaries are the central feature of ethnic divisions (qtd. in Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 27). When people live in a particular locale they are bound to have a shared collective experience. But for writers like Kingston who experience alienation and loneliness in America, a new boundary isolating the ethnic American comes into existence. Any kind of marginalization implies a certain power that pushes to the boundaries but at the same time is an aspiration towards the centre.

The outermost boundary is a frontier. And a frontier is never static. All static boundaries are permeable because a crossing and re-crossing take place. *The Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology* states that “the study of ethnicity relates to cultural persistence and CHANGE, the maintenance and crossing of all established boundaries, and the construction of boundaries that both separate and bind people in a myriad of ways” (Seymour-Smith 96). Kingston represents this by the technique of disguise. Crossing gender boundaries is depicted in *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior*. In *The Woman Warrior* the crossing over is by a woman. Fa Mu Lan dresses as a male warrior to save her people. And in *China Men* the crossing over is by a man. In *China Men* Tang Aao is kidnapped and taken to Woman’s Land and made to appear like a woman. One also finds that Kingston who is the narrator takes a double voice of a Chinese and an American narrating to her Chinese and American audience especially to the latter. By

crossing boundaries one gets more exposed to varied cultures and forms a new boundary –that of a hybrid. Lei Lani Nishime says that for Kingston, “alienation is so complete that she must read books written by outsiders to find out about herself and try to find a self that she can recognize” (72). She has to create an alternative authority for a complete definition of her hybrid identity.

To many others ethnicity convincingly depicts the representation of their culture and tradition. By highlighting their marginal life in a modern world ethnic identities try to assert their cultural distinctiveness. If assertion of individuality is denied the next best thing is to assert a collective identity through cultural distinctiveness. This is reassuring, and is a survival strategy. But ethnicity, certainly, does not mean advancing one’s cultural interests alone. Ethnicity leads to the discovery of a national, cultural identity and an understanding of common values.

Several attempts have been made at defining the complex concept of ethnicity. People who share certain common cultural values, biological similarities and live within well-defined geographical boundaries have certain commonness. One does not totally erase one’s culture or past on encountering a new culture, but assimilates both, consciously and unconsciously the other culture without losing out one’s own. Thus a new boundary, isolating the ethnic American comes into existence. He neither upholds only his past nor does he become completely Americanized. When one lives within the close confines of boundaries, one tends to share certain cultural traits.

Hybridity leads to crossing of boundaries – geographical, gender, genre. Being a second-generation immigrant Kingston’s geographical crossing over takes place even before her birth. So if she wants to know of China she is required to read what others

have written about China, or rely on what relatives and friends tell her from talk stories and memory. Nishime says: “Kingston must expand the boundaries of ethnic autobiography in order to explore her identity as a Chinese American and create an alternative authority rather than formulating a complete definition of that identity for the imagined outside reader” (72).

Ethnicity raises questions of belonging. Belonging is both sociological and psychological. Sameness or similarity results in a feeling of belonging to a group. This could be linguistic, biological or based on a shared cultural heritage. Ethnic identities do not feel they belong only to one space. In *Introduction to Race Relations* E. Ellis Cashmore and Barry Troyna say: “Ethnic group is a number of people who perceive themselves to be in some way united because of their sharing either a common background, present position or future – or a combination of these” (12). Giovanni looks at it from a new angle: “The true joy, perhaps, of being a Black American is that we really have no home. Europeans bought us; but the Africans sold” (*Prosaic* 373). So they do not know to which geographical space they belong. It is only their self-assertion which reveals their ethnicity. This feeling of not belonging makes them lonely. In “Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day” Giovanni says:

They have asked
 the psychiatrists psychologists politicians and
 social workers
 What this decade will be
 known for
 There is no doubt it is

loneliness [. . .] (*Cotton* 21)

Belonging is based on certain common identifications – in language, food, music, names, habits, traditions, and social roles. It is only when one wants to belong that one will assert to bring out one’s sameness. Belonging is a way of identifying with the group fully knowing one is unacceptable elsewhere. Ethnic identities are seldom regarded as the “real” Americans. Kingston finds mainstream attitudes ethnocentric. When Kingston worked in an art supply house that sold paints to artists her boss told her: “‘Order more of that nigger yellow, willya’? the boss told me. ‘Bright, isn’t it? Nigger yellow. I don’t like that word’, I had to say in my bad, small-person’s voice that makes no impact. The boss never deigned to answer” (*Woman Warrior* 48). In a similar confrontation:

I also worked at a land developers association. The building industry was planning a banquet for contractors, real estate dealers, and real estate editors. “Did you know the restaurant you chose for the banquet is being picked by CORE and the NACCP?” I squeaked. “Off course I know”. The boss laughed. “That’s why I chose it”. “I refuse to type these invitations”, I whispered, voice unreliable. He leaned back in his leather chair, his bossy stomach opulent. He picked up his calendar and slowly circled a date. “You will be paid up to here”, he said. “We’ll mail you the check”.

(*Woman Warrior* 48-49)

In both cases her protests are of no use. But she clearly feels that she belongs to America. Steven V. Hunsaker supports this and says: “she can defend its ideals, and can identify those whose behavior places them outside the ‘real’ America” (457). It is not enough to appropriate a language but to use this language to define the community excluding others

from it. This is what Kingston does in the above-mentioned case. One notices that the push and the pull make Kingston also experience the same feeling of alienation which undermines one's sense of belonging. Speaking to Kay Bonnetti she says: "Since being (sic) to China, a feeling that I have now, too, is how lonely it is in America. I mean, not just how lonely it was when my mother came, but how lonely it is now" (qtd. in Skenazy 44). She expresses a similar sense of not belonging in the words of Sahn Goong in *China Men*: "What's the use of staying here anymore? You don't belong here. There's nothing for you to do here. Go home. Go back to China. Go" (169). Yet Kingston articulates a new voice, about her belonging to the hybrid space of Chinese American.

Belonging also means conformity. An ethnic group is an extended family since the ethnic immigrant lives within ethnic bounds. The family and fellow feeling bond is strong. Among the Native Americans relationship is regarded as a major tribal value. If one leaves the tribe, until one is united, one experiences brokenness. And wholeness is restored only when one rejoins one's tribe. Allen is half Indian, half Lebanese; so she feels isolated from the Laguna tribe, not being a pure breed. She experiences isolation, denial, powerlessness and loss of self. She expresses these ideas in her works to flush out these feelings or to create a space for herself as a person and as a writer.

Race implies belonging to a group with similar physical features, colour, cultural traditions and values, and it is a badge for identity. It is one's racial features that index culturally different groups. As Giovanni opines, "what can they ask you to put / on paper that isn't already written / on your face" in the poem "How Do You Write A Poem?" (*Collected Poetry* 136), their racial sufferings are reflected in their works.

Marginalisation or minoritisation of a racial group leads to racism, and racism is a barrier

to solidarity. Racism takes its birth from ethnocentrism. Even today its existence can be illustrated with a recent example of how thousands of complaints about alleged racism towards the Indian star Shilpa Shetty reached the British Office of Communications. In a news report titled “From Bollywood to Jibe Street”, *The Hindu* dated 17 Jan. 2007 reports:

A British celebrity reality television show said on Tuesday that it would not tolerate bullying or racist abuse, following a torrent of complaints over the treatment of the Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty. [. . .] Britain’s media watchdog Ofcom (Office of Communications) has received complaints over allegations of bullying and racist abuse towards Ms. Shetty, who has regularly been reduced to tears by the antics of a gang of her fellow housemates. Ms. Shetty’s accent has been mocked, a clique has ganged up against her and given her a tough time, dealt her regular insults, and viewers believe one housemate called her a “Paki” [. . .] (14).

Richard Alba in *Ethnicity and Race in the U.S.A* says: “While ‘ethnicity’ stresses cultural and social features, it also implies some biological kinship among those who share a common identity” (117). It seems that the author believes in the biological kinship of immigrants. But this cannot be a precondition for ethnic connectedness. To a common fund of heritage one is contributing one’s share, and one wants one’s share to be identified. Giovanni is forthright in her observation of racism:

Because the biggest stumbling block to progress in America is still racism. Because we have to find a way to comfort young white people about the fact that, though they will never stride atop that wonderful white horse and

rule the world again, they can make valid contributions to our planet. The world is not, and has never been, white. (*Prosaic* 511)

As a responsible writer she feels she is to fight for her people and make them aware of the tricky ways of the mainstream. This feeling is revealed in her lines: “and i’ve got to negotiate / for my people’s freedom” (*Collected Poetry* 48).

Allen expresses the persecution her race (the Native Americans) suffered as a part of coerced assimilation at the hands of the mainstream in her poem “Molly Brant, Iroquois Matron, Speaks”:

Then, overnight, was I
 fleeing for my life
 across the new borders, my brother hunted
 like a common criminal
 to be tried for sedition
 for his part
 among the British. (*Skins and Bones* 11)

The men who came from China to build rail-roads were victimized by the mainstream. Ah Goong and the other China men were scattered to other sites of toil, pursued by white masters who murdered and mutilated with impunity. Walter Cummins says: “But the China Men who arrived in America quickly became victimized by their race and their status” (141). Like Africans and Native Americans, the Chinese also suffered racism. Cummins continues: “California regulations of 1878 forbad (sic) Chinese the right to own land or business licenses, to be hired for work, or even to testify

in court” (141). The inhuman prejudices that stemmed from binaries like “them and us” resulted in racism.

Races are simply pigeonholes conveniently labelled, and the process of labelling is loaded with ulterior motives. Nikki Giovanni says: “The spirituals teach us that the problem of the twentieth century is not the problem of the color line. The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of civilizing white people” (*Prosaic* 427). Differential standards are attached to different races, and the resultant colonial hierarchies create racial consciousness. Allen in an interview says that the mainstream would like to erase the Native Americans completely, having forgotten that they depended on these Indians for their survival in the past. Native Americans are being stereotyped as “savages”. Allen says: “There’s a terrible racism operating. A terrible stereotyping. People in this country learned about Indians from the media” (Interview with Ballinger and Swann 13).

The conflict that results when different races come into contact needs to be understood. Ruth Benedict an anthropologist says in the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* of race conflict “it is not *race* that we need to understand, but *conflict*; so, for an understanding of ethnic groups in a social system, it is not on racial or cultural differences that we need to focus our attention, but on group relations” (167). Race is a derogatory term, but ethnicity is very dignified, because ethnicity asserts culture. When ethnic groups begin to assert themselves the result will be a series of conflicts. The dominant culture dehumanizes not only through racism but also homogenizing. This is what happened to Denise Levertov, because she was Eurocentric and married to an American writer she was donned as being more privileged but was actually, by inclusion

into the mainstream, silently erased. In the politics of inclusion/exclusion once accepted one's uniqueness is absorbed and standardized unless one's identity is asserted.

Certain characteristics of a group are handed down from generation to generation, which can act like stigmas or have a reverse effect. For example, to the Black is attached the stigma of inferiority. It is so deeply ingrained in their psyche that it is a label of their race. Nikki Giovanni in "Forced Retirement" says:

nothing makes sense
 if we are just a collection of genes
 on a freudian altar to the species
 i don't like those theories
 telling me why I feel as I do
 behaviorisms never made sense
 outside feeling [. . .] (*Cotton* 28)

American racism has categorized the behaviour of all Blacks as predictable in a certain way. These pre-conceived notions also pave the way for Blacks to cling to each other and in turn assert their distinctiveness.

The Puritans were the first Euro centric immigrants who had similarities in culture, physical characteristics and practices. Slowly Italians, Germans, the French, the Spanish, the Portugese all came and began to mix with them. These formed the mainstream, practising xenophobia and uniting because of a common language – English. For Asians, Red Indians, Blacks and Jews it was all different. So the non-European minorities were kept at bay because of several differences beginning with physical characteristics, culture and practices.

All ethnic groups seem to congregate on alien soils primarily because they are constrained to leave their own land for better prospects elsewhere; they reach the adopted land as needy persons, virtual refugees looking for a better life. Subsequently the mainstream tends to look down upon the new arrivals. This results in friction of the ethno-cultural type. Despite all attempts at homogenization and the practice of cosmopolitanism, the ethnic groups remain mostly marginalized, and therefore alienated. What the mainstream does is to create cultural boundaries that are out of bounds for the ethnic minorities.

There was a time when Jews were not ostracized from the mainstream. But a time came when anti Semitic feelings the world over segregated Jews from the rest of the Europeans. So they lived in a state of estrangement. Levertov was Euro centric and Jewish by descent, a "mixture of Kelt and Semite," (*Life in the Forest* 53). She experienced isolation in her first few years after her arrival in America though not to the extent of the others. But she was sensitive to racism after the Vietnam War. Her Hasidic value system prevented her from merging with the mainstream. The mainstream represents Eurocentric whites who are ethnocentric, militaristic, white supremacist, racist and masculinist in ideology. Looking at Levertov from the outside she could be part of the mainstream. But she was far away from them in ideology. It was her belief system that impelled an alternative culture within the mainstream. So she did not experience concrete personal suffering like Allen, Giovanni and Kingston. She began to be concerned about racism only with the Vietnam period when empathy with the Vietnamese taught her about racism back home. In the poem "Freeing of the Dust," she says:

Unwrap the dust from its mummycloths.

Let Ariel learn

a blessing for Caliban

and Caliban drink dew from the lotus [. . .] (*Freeing* 113)

The newcomers satisfy a psychological need by befooling themselves that they belong to their adopted land. But in their heart of hearts they know that their plight is going to be marked by alienation. Fighting their plight Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen expose and interrogate the authoritarian emblems of hegemonic ideologies. Ethnic writers feel they are saddled with the burden and responsibility of being mouthpieces of ethnic experiences which the mainstream is made to feel and be aware. As immigration continues ethnicity is continuously being reinvented in America as reflected in the writings of these four writers.

The paradigm change comes on an awareness of the situation and its injustice. This awareness wants to be free of looking at things from the mainstream perspective. Giovanni explains this saying, “our people have been burdened . . . by someone else’s sense . . . of the appropriate” (*Those Who Ride the Night Winds* 14).

Feelings of superiority come naturally to a dominant group when they realize they are a dominant culture. They feel their superior culture is enough to wield power over the minorities. Ethnocentrism is a necessary and unfair attitude of dominant cultures towards alien ones. It is “evaluating other cultures according to preconceptions originating in one’s own culture” (“Ethnocentric”). For example, it is assumed that White American women are soft and delicate whereas Black women are strong and can do a great deal of work. The conventional meaning of ethnocentrism needs to be scrutinized from a new

angle of perception. Just as the mainstream evaluates the ethnic groups in their own ways the ethnic groups can evaluate the mainstream by means of their own parameters. The result would be the same – socio-cultural friction leading to dissonance, disharmony and subsequent problems. Giovanni says: “Black American slavery does at least openly admit women were worked like men, though, I think the term is ‘worked like a . . .’” (*Prosaic* 299). Allen says that she finds American culture a dead culture and inferior to Indian culture. In the poem “Myth/Telling – Dream/Showing” the Indian woman says: “who hates in herself what is white. / says she sees it like vomit. like / a crippled withered leg she must drag / with her everywhere she goes” (*Skins and Bones* 59).

Narrowness at all levels can be disparaging. As Levertov in “Three Meditations” expresses how the same “I” can represent every man suffering from ethnocentrism and can also represent the tyrant “I” that looks down on others. She says “there is darkness in me”:

I, I, I, I.
 I multitude, I tyrant,
 I angel, I you, you
 world battlefield, stirring
 with unheard litanies, sounds of piercing
 green half smothered by
 strewn bones. (*Denise Levertov Poems 1960-1967* 32)

Allen in the Poem “Pocahontas to Her English Husband, John Rolfe” says:

[. . .] I’m sure
 you wondered at my silence, saying I was

a simple wanton, a savage maid,
 dusky daughter of heathen sires
 who cartwheeled naked through muddy towns
 who would learn the ways of grace only
 by your firm guidance, through [. . .] (*Skins and Bones* 9)

Giovanni prefers to be oppressed by Black men rather than white ethnocentrism. In the poem “Oppression” she says:

[. . .] we all recognize how they have
 kept us in bondage for the last four hundred years
 i mean i could really dig being oppressed by Black men
 cause that would mean at least someone I love
 is in power [. . .] (*Collected Poetry* 128)

It is the mainstream’s ethnocentrism that propels ethnic minorities like Kingston to resurrect historical myths and heroes to defend their country. And today Kingston says: “My own *Woman Warrior* is being used as a text at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs” (*Fifth Book* 49).

To the mainstream American every ethnic is virtually “the other”. They are either accommodated or tolerated, but never accepted. The minorities look at themselves through the eyes of the mainstream. And they go through a kind of “double consciousness”, (Chametzky *Decentralised Literature* 4). “Double consciousness” is a term meaning looking at oneself through the eyes of the mainstream as well as looking at one’s own native self against the racial background. This is a term used by W.E.B.

Dubois, *In The Souls of Black Folk* about the doubleness of the Black folk. Critically

analyzing their status the minorities feel secondary to the mainstream. Expressing this Allen says: “Through their eyes, / I see myself punitive, demanding, irrelevant” (*Skins and Bones* 36). Hence the bicultural writer is all the time looking at herself through the eyes of the mainstream. She sees herself as backward in every way, yet experiences diversity in the composite self. Experiencing this feeling of “the other” and reaction to this, they define themselves. Giovanni says that she grew up hearing “ – that I had to be better” (*Poetic Equation* 7) since the mainstream is everything that the immigrant is not. This attitudinal defect gets manifest in public and private behaviour. Adding to the seriousness of social friction a plethora of prejudices could be found in attendance. Conversely the ethnics themselves bring to bear upon the relationships sundry prejudices and social biases owing to their own cultural baggage. Thus each party gets involved in the social tangle which becomes more and more complex with the passage of time. Speaking to Margaret Walker Giovanni says the Black people have to take over their destiny. She reiterates Margaret Walker’s idea saying: “[. . .] we are descendants of Africa, and I’m going to say something further – we are also the *inheritors* of America. We are the new race . . .” (*Poetic Equation* 6).

Ethnicity helps to define the otherness of a population and to define one’s own specificity. “Whatever the pair, the Other is made to feel apart from the whole rather than a part of it, and ends up subordinated and oppressed” (Ruthven 41). Ethnicity in the world of *Homoaequalis* is achieved by differentiating a segment of the population in terms of properties ascribed to each member of that segment. This is something similar to what W. Lloyd Warner termed “‘ethnicity’ in the sense of a trait that separates the individual from some classes and identifies him with others” (Sollors, “Theory of

American Ethnicity” 260). Thus “the other” is always treated as a dispensable supplement or a threat.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* mirrors a double attitude towards the Orient – firstly the mainstream is attracted to the Orient yet contemptuous of its poverty, secondly the Orient fulfils the mainstream fantasy of exoticism. Said imagines the Orient as occupying the position of “the other”. Kingston eloquently expresses this in the exchanges between mother and daughter as seen in *China Men*:

‘We believe in the Chinese religion’. ‘Chinese is our race,’ I said. ‘Well tell the teacher demon it’s Kung Fu Tse, then’, she said. The kids at school said, ‘are you Catholic?’ ‘No’ ‘Then you’re a Protestant’. So our dog tags had *O* for religion and *O* for race because neither black nor white. Mine also has *O* for blood type. Some kids said *O* was for ‘Oriental,’ but I knew it was for ‘Other’ [. . .] (276)

The community that is sexist and the mainstream that is racist create in them a double consciousness that is crippling for their real identity to push forth. Deborah L. Madsen speaking of Kingston says: “Within the terms of Chinese culture she is guilty of femininity; in terms of American culture she is guilty of ethnic Otherness” (240-41).

By merely sidelining the minorities and making them feel that they are: ‘the other’, the White culture is simply exorcising off the feeling that their presence is threatened. The fear of the White majority is that if the minority speaks they may make themselves heard. And there is a possibility that the mainstream culture may cut a sorry figure next to them. Hence the other is silenced. Matt T. Salo in the journal *Western Folklore* quotes George Devos: “Ethnicity as defined in current anthropological literature

refers to the subjective awareness of the members of one group that they are different from those of other groups” (34). They experience an awareness of being dissimilar. The ethnic identities are not willing to be treated as secondary citizens. When treated as a secondary subject or as an object it certainly can be dehumanizing. Sue Johnston says that, “Kingston refuses the role of racial or sexual other and invents herself as speaking subject” (136). She refuses to be hemmed in by conventions. Thus, writers foreground the need for recognizing identities, voices and situations that are not granted by the mainstream culture but are perceived and defined by ethnic identities.

Societies are also organized by binary polarities – based on the assumption that man is the self and woman is “the other”. Simone de Beauvoir argues that women are caught up in a social syntax in which they are never the subject but always “the other”. Beauvoir makes a classic exposition of alterity. She says: “Women are not inferior by Nature but inferiorised by culture: they are acculturated into inferiority” (Ruthven 45). Kingston says: “when we Chinese girls listened to the adults’ talk-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves” (*Woman Warrior* 19). There is yet another self engendered by the other dichotomy that arises between the mainstream and ethnic identities. This can be illustrated by Fanon’s words in *Black Skin White Masks*: “A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man – or at least like a nigger” (114). Once an ethnocentric evaluation has taken place individuals and races are placed in watertight compartments. Both mainstream and ethnic identities size each other up knowing their own, and each other’s places. Fanon quotes Hegel in *The Black Skin White Masks*: “they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each

other” (217). Having suffered great anguish, one goes through a self-introspection. One notices how others are different from ethnic identities, and what the link with them is.

The ethnic is “the other” because of prejudices. They are used according to their utility, so they remain aliens despite the passage of time. They are never fully accepted, and in fact they are rejected. Each writer of ethnic identity also looks at the mainstream American culture from his own vantage point. As a result the Occident can even be viewed as “the other”, and these writers express themselves and their realities in this manner. And so there is a move to retrieve the history of the silenced subaltern – especially the ethnic woman, “the other”.

People assert their culture to reveal their differences as well as uniqueness. In this the unconscious has a major role to play. Sometimes it is done also to make wealth and to gain attention. Thus a kind of love hate relationship is felt towards ethnicity. The mainstream also has this ambivalence. For example jazz and blues are a contribution of the Blacks. But this is very popular among the Americans. Even the flamboyant colour sense of the Africans is aped by Americans. Thus the contributions of “the other” do enrich the mainstream culture.

No more does one have the pure nation since ethnicity is a major phenomenon in several developed nations. It is the central concept to analyze social change in the world today. There is the emergence of hybrids on account of assimilation. Straddling cultures also leads to cultural diffusion and a new hybridity. Hybridity being dynamic changes its shape, form and vigour, and is multidimensional. The hybrid is often enlightened because of exposure to different cultures. Barbara Johnson says “differences between” has given way to “differences within” (qtd. in Ahokas 105). A mixing of cultures makes the hybrid

dislocated, and he searches for a space to relocate himself and the platform from which to speak. The presence of multiple identities is a common feature in societies today. The image of “black skin white masks” indeed suggests hybridity or a violated authenticity. The ethnic skin and the borrowed mask is a white borderline between reality and pretense. Hybridity reflects consequences of inter marriage and mixing of racial groups. This leads to the formation of hybrids. The hybrid culture is another culture with its own marks of distinction and relevance of uniqueness which is represented by these writers. It has the hybrid vigour which is superior to that of the cultures involved. It is not possible to represent another culture at its best except by a first hand experience and long hours of reflection. The subaltern or the hybrid is allowed to speak. Edward Said opines:

[. . .] the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they *are* representations are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer. If the latter alternative is the correct one (as I believe it is), then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the ‘truth’, which is itself a representation. (272)

One is struck by the melting pot theory on one hand, and honours cultural pluralism on the other because of one’s yearning for peace and harmony at all times. In *The American Scene* Henry James describes the immigrant wrestling with his double self to propel himself as a composite self. In a geographical space when heterogeneous groups coexist there is bound to be conflict from ethnic dissonance. Ethnicity is getting more and

more emphasized because it is a basic need. The ethnic immigrant cannot be naturalized much as he wishes. The first feeling he has is to get accepted, and to get a work permit. The next is to get citizenship. From immigrant status to citizen status when he moves his mark of ethnicity stands out. It is difficult for an immigrant to get naturalized because his ethnicity does not change but is reinforced in spite of naturalization. Crevecoeur's theory of an American identity is where all races are melted into a new race (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 75) of men whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.

According to the melting pot theory, immigrants coming to America sooner or later shed their ethos and become Americanised. Richard Alba in his book *Ethnic Identity* describes the transformation of ethnicity which has taken place in the U.S.: "Around the time of World War II and soon thereafter, the expectation was that ethnic Americans would assimilate the main stream American culture and their sense of ethnicity would gradually disappear. This assumption is known as the melting pot theory" (*International Encyclopedia of Sociology* 475). Sociologist Milton Gordon feels that of the three images of assimilation the most important is the Anglo-conformity. What Gordon is hitting out at is not Anglo-conformity, but Euro centrism. This theory emerged from the title of Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* (1908) where the hero expounds the theme saying, "America is God's crucible, the great Melting Pot where all races of Europe are melting and reforming" (Chametzky, "Beyond Melting Pots" 6). On a close scrutiny one finds the U. S. is a rich mixture of races, creeds, and nationalities. Hence cultural diffusion runs parallel to heterogeneity, and heterogeneity asserts itself and forms a mosaic of cultures.

People with different histories and cultures have shared and accommodated themselves with one another in the American soil. This melting pot idea is a kind of cultural fusion – a melting down of partition walls and boundaries. To Philip Gleason the melting pot theory is just “multiplicity in unity, an orchestration of mankind” (Chametzky, “Beyond Melting Pots” 8). It is widely accepted that the melting down did not take place completely because multiculturalism is the hallmark of many a society. Jules Chametzky opines that Rudolf Vecoli, Milton Gordon and other leading historians of American immigrant history share the view that “the melting pot simply didn’t happen” (“Beyond Melting Pots” 3). However the melting pot theory has led to more confusion than fusion. Theodore Roosevelt “*opposed* the melting pot idea because they were convinced there were large bodies of quite unmeltable ethnics” (Chametzky, “Beyond Melting Pots” 9).

One of the reasons for the melting pot idea not getting validated by modern scholars is the search for ethnic identity supported by the collective unconscious of the immigrant, something that one perpetrates as well as resists. There are many factors at work in the creation of this situation. One of them is the push-pull theory relating to ethnicity. Even as the immigrant is drawn towards his adopted culture and social milieu, there is a pull from behind, emanating from his racial past. This process is augmented by the fact that the push he has towards the new culture never gets fully realized owing to socio-political factors. As a result the melting-pot concept does not seem to work in practical terms. This is reinforced in by Carl Jung’s theory on the subject. Basic group identity comprises what Harold Isaac calls ““primordial affinities and attachments”” (qtd. in Glazer and Moynihan, *Ethnicity* 30). In trying to account for the upsurge of ethnicity

today, one can see that it is the emergent expression of primordial feelings long suppressed, but now awakened and seeking its due place, in the new social set up which the immigrant confronts. These writers of ethnic identity assert their cultural past as a part of their ethnic identity. Michael Banton's idea of "acculturation" is a part of the melting pot theory. It means to become a part of the mainstream. Michael Banton defines it in *Race Relations*: "The process of change in the culture of a group of people adjusting to continuing contact with some other group is known as acculturation" (77).

Ethnicity is not just biological but cultural and religious. Ethnicity gets diluted through the process of Sanskritisation which manifests itself in imitating the so-called master race in many ways. Allen describes the change in Ephanie in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* when she leaves her tribe to marry an American. She says: "No cartwheels. No flying leaps from rooftops to horse's back [. . .] Instead high heels and lipstick. That she suddenly craved, intently" (203). But despite this the differences persist, and the alienation continues. Allen describes the Westernization of Indians in the poem "Los Angeles 1980":

The dying generation moves purposefully:
 well-dressed in Jantzen and Wrangler
 Gucci and Adidas, clothes, bodies,
 smiles gleaming, cool in the practiced
 superiority of well-cut, natural fiber
 clothes and vitamin-drenched consciousness [. . .]

(Life is a Fatal Disease 151)

Just like assimilation, “Sanskritisation” is yet another theory which expounds the belief that a minority cultural group is always overrun by a dominant cultural group.

M.N. Sreenivas talks of how in India, the other classes always looked up to the Brahmin class. Eventually, through imitation and shedding of the cultural traits of their own class, the lower classes modelled themselves on the Brahmins. Here one finds a melting down or acculturation taking place. This also throws light on the Sanskritisation of the West – that is, imitating and copying all that they saw in the West, or in mainstream American culture, and adopting this as their very own by weak cultures. Kingston in *Tripmaster Monkey* describes Wittman Ah Sing as a twenty-three-year old fifth generation Chinese American hippie. He is a graduate of Berkeley (English major) who loves English and apes the mainstream to hide his identity. “His cowboy boots, old brown Wellingtons, hit its pavements hard” (*Tripmaster* 3).

Crossing boundaries can result in several changes. In his *Cultural Identity and Global Process* Jonathan Friedman says: “Ethnic affiliation can be easily changed or complemented by geographic mobility or by change in residence. Where a member of a group changes residence he is adopted or adopts the local ancestors or gods and becomes a practicing member of the new community. Here the social group is more like a congregation than a biological unit” (30), but one is still unaccepted as mainstream. Ephanie in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* marries a white man and goes away from the tribe. Allen describes this as a breach of trust. She leaves Gudalupe her Indian tribe to follow her American husband. Allen describes this as a fall. She says: “After she fell she had begun rising early to attend morning Mass” (203). By doing this she yearns for an upward mobility but in turn she experiences a sense of brokenness and loss being

alienated from her tribe. “I abandoned myself she said” and this was no great achievement. In *Tripmaster Monkey* Wittman Ah Sing is found aping the mainstream. He is scared of revealing his Chinese traits. He wears his hair long, uses coloured glasses and dresses in a flashy manner. And when Nanci asks him about his life he reveals an inferiority complex pretending to be something he is not and is suspicious of her. Kingston describes: “Is that a sneer on her face? In her voice? Is she stereotypecasting him? Is she showing him the interest of an anthropologist, or a tourist? No, guess not” (*Tripmaster* 12-13).

One can imitate the West, and get acculturated but one stands out because of one’s biological traits. Harold R. Isaacs says: “An individual can change his name, ignore or conceal his origins, disregard or rewrite his history, adopt a different nationality, learn a new language[. . .] But there is not much he can do to change his body” (qtd. in Glazer and Moynihan, *Ethnicity* 36-7).

Identity comes from the body and the self which are integral and inseparable parts of social identification. That is why it is said that ethnicity and behaviour have a one to one relation. Besides, lack of contact with old country, and constant and continuous exposure to American life can result in cultivated changes. Some body changes occur as a result from cultural change and climate also. For example, hair can be dyed, coloured or straightened. The body’s appearance can also be changed by cosmetics, attempts at colouring the hair and bleaching the skin and the use of coloured contact lenses. By imitating the mainstream they make their wish loud and clear for an upward movement in life. Celebrities like Michael Jackson and Tina Turner who in spite of fame, want to

identify with White culture and make a conscious attempt to look different yet their biological traits give them away.

Ethnicity is basically biological. It is a racial distinctiveness, which one gets from one's parents and from individual residence or environment. Giovanni rebukes young Black folk for thinking they can be like the white mainstream by imitating them. She says: “[. . .] people *really* think if they change their hairstyle or toothpaste or deodorant that they will live happily ever after. The level of fantasy, unreality, is absurd” (*Prosaic* 332). Thus, the melting pot stands rejected as unworthy of acceptance, and scholars take recourse to the mosaic theory.

According to the mosaic theory the immigrants to America did not get acculturated but lived in their new environment assimilating new values and manners but stood out because of their differences. Whether they liked it or not their individual identities could never be effaced to make them a part of the mainstream. In *Tripmaster Monkey* Kingston describes Wittman Ah Sing as a fifth generation Chinese American. He has an American first name. Whitman's individual and ethnic identity is in his appearance and his Chinese surname. He has Chinese parentage and looks, but is a self made American. He is a representative of the contemporary American. He has the democratic voice of Walt Whitman. He feels the need to introduce himself since American history is not White history alone. He says in *Tripmaster Monkey*:

Stop the music – I have to butt in and introduce myself and my race [. . .]

Wittman wanted to spoil all those stories coming out of and set in New England Back East-to blacken and to yellow Bill, Brooke, and Annie. A new rule for the imagination: The common man has Chinese looks. From

now on, whenever you read about those people with no surnames, color them with black skin or yellow skin. (34)

Just as in a mosaic, where the pieces are held together, their uniqueness is the focal point for all to gaze on because of their differences. America is referred to as the showcase of different cultures. And it is true that all these cultures stand out in one way or another. But the idea of the mosaic is static, and culture is something dynamic. From the melting pot one moves to the patchwork quilt, and then to the gorgeous mosaic, and now the tossed salad.

Horace Kallen introduced the concept of the tossed salad which implies cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralism arises out of tolerance of other cultures. This leads to cultural diffusion, hybridity. Today immigrant writers are confident, uninhibited and bold to express what they feel come what may. They are more conscious of their rights as human beings. They do not consciously try to assimilate but live in America expecting mainstream Americans to accept them just as they are. The melting pot theory image of America is misleading since what America resembles is more a platter containing a wide variety of dishes, each retaining distinctive ingredients and tastes. David Leiwei Li says: “Kingston, however, addresses neither the experience of being Chinese in America nor American in China but rather the experience of being a Chinese – American growing up in the United States” (498). Ethnic identities stand out just like ingredients in a tossed salad, that is, essentially parts of the salad yet not losing their individuality or identity. The idea of the tossed salad is more acceptable today to Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen. They have accepted the American label yet cling to their ethnic experiences and past too, which plays a vital role in shaping their identities as ethnic Americans.

Since the ethnic writers are more assertive, the theory of the tossed salad is more acceptable. This phenomenon has gained momentum on a wider scale. That is exactly why the idea of the melting pot or the idea of the mosaic cannot be accepted.

From the concept of the tossed salad emerges the theory of Neo-ethnicity. Neo-ethnicity is a new generation concept. The concept visualises ethnicity as different from what the previous generations said about it. It includes the ethnic who has imbibed some aspects of the new culture he is exposed to and emerging as a hybrid who straddles cultures. Ethnicity is something re-invented as generations move along. It is not static but dynamic, and therefore, subject to change. As Werner Sollors in his introduction to *The Invention of Ethnicity* says: “[. . .] ethnicity is not so much an ancient and deep-seated force surviving from the historical past, but rather the modern and modernizing feature of a contrasting strategy that may be shared far beyond the boundaries within which it is claimed” (xiv). It is a modern contrasting concept – a part of the old is taken to reinvent the new. This can be illustrated by Allen’s poem “Womanwork” in the collection, *A Cannon Between my Knees*:

they use old pots
 broken fragments
 castaway
 bits to make new
 mixed with clay it
 makes strong
 bowls, jars.

Anthropologist Abner Cohen sees “ethnicity as a part of a power system” (qtd. in Sollors, “Theory of American Ethnicity” 265) where one is forcefully trying to change someone against his will. Kingston says: “The result is that I am making up meanings as I go along which is the way I live anyway. There is a lot of detailed doubting here [. . .] (*Hawai‘i* xvii). Neo-colonialism offers many rewards to a new moneyed middle class. Also men are promised affluence and dignity if they give up their primordial ties. This is part of assimilation and assimilation is a move towards upward mobility. But the promise is an empty one, and they now return to their primordial ties with a renewed vigour. Giovanni says: “[. . .] ‘there’s going to be a Black Revolution all over the world and we must prepare for it. We’ve got to determine our own standards of eligibility. That’s all” (*Prosaic* 51-52).

Ethnicity is a matrix of differences and is represented as a social construct. Wittman in *Tripmaster Monkey* says: “‘It’s our fault they call us ‘gook and chinky china men’. We’ve been here all this time, before Columbus, (sic) and haven’t named ourselves. Look at the Blacks beautifully defining themselves” (326). Throughout the novel Wittman contemplates suicide, and changes his character and identity. In trying to account for the upsurge of ethnicity today one can see that it is the emergent expression of primordial feelings long suppressed but now awakened and seeking a redress and expression. As Daniel Bell enlightens us:

Throughout the world today, the largest and most important category of group membership (particularly in its ability to rouse emotional feelings) is that broad set which we call ‘communal’—individuals who feel some consciousness of kind which is not contractual, and which involves some

common links through primordial or cultural ties. Broadly speaking, there are four such ties; race; color; language; ethnicity.

(qtd. in Glazer and Moynihan *Ethnicity* 155)

Ethnicity is a representation also of something linguistically constructed. Individuals reinvent ethnicity in different generations. Ethnicity is something modern because it is not to be understood in terms of the past alone, or ethnic groups living together following their own way of life. Neither is it to be understood in terms of clear cut boundaries but in terms of mixing individuals who become ethnically conscious of distinctions in the process of mixing (a shared cultural context) and regard these visible distinctions as a modern feature of a contrasting strategy.

The linguistic element is the text which plays a central role in the construction of a social universe. Sollors says: “It is the ethnic texts ability to generate the sense of difference out of a shared cultural context [. . .]” (*Invention* xvi). Ethnicity is to be understood as a modern yet natural strategy that becomes visible in cultural encounters, and is a conscious process against mono-culturalism under the guise of globalization. Since it is modern it continues to be the centre of major discussions and debates, though it starts from the past. Ethnicity is a manifestation of racial/cultural heritage, and the identity of an ethnic group/individual on encountering another culture, consciously or unconsciously forming a new identity with bipolar experiences. This gives rise to the neo-ethnic identity which puts itself against the mainstream. Describing the mainstream’s attitude, Giovanni remarks: “[. . .] they still hoard, they still are the ants, and we are the grasshoppers. It almost appears to be genetic. A Black man today with a million dollars will spend it and have a ball. A white man will invest and save” (*Prosaic* 118-19).

Giovanni continues: “Being Black and poor is, I think, radically different from being anything else and poor. Poor, to most Blacks, is a state of mind. Those who accept it are poor; those who struggle are middle class” (*Prosaic* 331).

The writers of ethnic identity want to assert their differences, yet consolidate their upward mobility. They imbibe American values but cannot be like the Whites. Yet they do not like to abandon their upward mobility and growth. Nancy Siefer notes:

There was a feeling among many liberals at that time, and I’m sure there still is, that being white, in and of itself, makes for upward mobility in America. It’s only the blacks and other minority groups that really need the help of government and other institutions. (*Nobody Speaks for Me* 21)

Kingston herself admits: “One reason you espouse yourself to a White person: access to more of the world” (*Fifth Book* 71). To many the real upward mobility does not rest in acquiring wealth and material possessions but in acceptance which they hardly get, hence their compulsive ethnic assertion.

Ethnic discrimination has the dark aspect of religious discrimination also. Some of the religious groups have been virtually prohibited from occupying positions in the American society as exemplified in the fact that so far in the history of American society only one Catholic could ever become the president of the nation. The mainstream believes that America is primarily Protestant and is confirmed by the widely known label – White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP). Religious and cultural discriminations pave the way for a new spirituality. Being caught between two cultures their belief systems are also affected. Giovanni says: “Black is a sacrament. It’s an outward visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace” (*Prosaic* 125). Disenchanted with the mainstream religion

many ethnics are moving towards humanism. Modern humanism is secular and is based on reason. It is man oriented. It believes that to be sufficiently human is divine enough. In it is rooted the ideas of Buddhism and Confucianism and also the centre of Christianity which is in Christ Jesus – human and divine. There is also a close link between liberation theology and humaneness. Liberation theology focuses on Jesus Christ as Saviour and Liberator. He liberates the oppressed and brings justice. The four writers focus on this sort of spirituality.

There is cultural stereotyping in writers of ethnic identities, because of this they resist and project their rich culture from a subject position. Werner Sollors says:

The immigrant child has the advantage or the burden of knowing what other children may more easily forget: a child, any child, necessarily lives in his own time, his own room. The child cannot have a life identical with that of his mother or his father. For the immigrant child this knowledge is inescapable. And often very, very sad. (*Invention* 11)

Choosing to write in English they speak of their differences and uniqueness, while Americans end up sounding like one another. By asserting their identity through self-ventilation they overcome the inferiority complex instilled in them by marginalisation. After self-introspection they gain confidence to write protest literature. Giovanni says: “I’m a revolutionary poet in a prerevolutionary (sic) world” (*Prosaic* 44). The mainstream has used ethnic identities to suit their purpose. After that it left them high and dry. Allen in the poem “One Who Skins Cats” says: “I was worth something then. I still am / But not what they say” (*Skins and Bones* 16). Today they decide their worth by asserting their hybrid identity. Their works deal with stark reality, striking outrage and

corrosive satire. There is an intermingling of form, genres, and gender roles. They write of a “fatherland” or a “motherland”. And their hunger for ethnic assurance is quenched by their use of ethnic idioms and techniques in narration. Though they are accused of being simplistic, inchoate and immature, their characteristic representations are built for contrast with mainstream American culture.

A society that allows different cultures to coexist is multicultural. Dogmatically multiculturalism need not be hostile. The broad canvas would allow the ethnic minorities to exist side by side and flourish with the mainstream. It is a different thing to say one is tolerant to allow multiculturalism and still be hostile to ethnic minorities. A multicultural person is a confluence of several streams of experience that makes him tolerant and cosmopolitan. Kingston says in an Interview:

When you are a person who comes from a multi-cultural background it just means you have more information coming in from the universe. And it's your task to figure out how it all integrates, figure out its order and its beauty. It's a harder, longer struggle. I feel that I am now a pretty integrated person. (Chin 63)

Leslie W. Rabine says that, “Kingston’s writing enacts what the swordswoman learns in her mystical vision of the dancing couple, that nothing is identical to itself but is always something else as well” (484). Influence of more cultures enriches one and changes one’s outlook on life. So one’s identity is a sum total of all cultural influences. Asserting one’s identity may lead to resisting one’s own handed down heritage and also the racist mainstream values. The neo-ethnicity one generates is a contrasting strategy and a changing shifting and dynamic one – the hallmark of contemporary multicultural society.

CHAPTER III

HYBRIDITY: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON EMERGENT RELATIONSHIPS

*To change is not necessarily to lose one's identity: to
change sometimes, is to find it.*

– George Tindall, *The Ethnic Southerners*

The hybrid is a confluence of cultures. This polarity of identities within dislocates and enlightens through the process of crossing and re-crossing boundaries. He/she is often enlightened in multi-polar ways. Hence he/she tends to react and retaliate. But, “Hybridity is not the only enlightened response to oppression” (qtd. in Gandhi 136). It is one of them, and is the result of binary thinking. It has become something common at this stage of civilisation. Hybrid identities are perpetually in motion, pursuing unpredictable routes often by passing old roots. They are always open to change. Hybrid communities lead to the negation of race concept, and this kind of crossing of cultures leads to the postmodern man.

In hybridisation which is a dialectical process, all suppressed groups hit back after a point of time and reassert themselves. Maxine Hong Kingston, Nikki Giovanni, Denise Levertov and Paula Gunn Allen are representatives of such suppressed groups. Exposed to American life their emblematic identity is a hybrid one. As hybrids they have a new set of values, a new set of attitudes and a subsequent change of functioning resulting from combined cultures. They are deeply involved in changes occurring outside. They want the world to acknowledge an emergence of hybrids. They wish to fight erasure, and highlight

differences. Thus, today hybridity is spreading in the U.S., to which these writers belong, as in most parts of the world.

This chapter deals with the sufferings of immigrants, their parents or ancestors, as well as the ways in which they got hybridized as preserved in their memory, and reflected in their works. They have internalized as theirs their parents' lived experiences. They have internalized even the Refugee Syndrome of not being accepted in an alien land. They keep on experiencing marginalisation at the hands of the mainstream ending up feeling unwanted. Kingston says in *The Woman Warrior*: ““This is terrible ghost country, where a human being works her life away”” (104). They feel alienated from their community that regards them as cultural violators, and from the mainstream that relegates them with the title of “the other”. In *The Woman Warrior* Kingston describes how any person not connected to the family, or community is considered alien or a ghost. Since they are so unlike those back at home they face a double exile or alienation. Their racial group isolates them, and the mainstream culture dispenses with them as “the other”. When one tries to ape the mainstream hoping to be accepted by them one faces rejection. This is best explained by Kingston's mother who blurts out information and then holds certain aspects back. “They would not tell us children because we had been born among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were ourselves ghost-like. They called us a kind of ghost” (*Woman Warrior* 183). Their community did not accept the Chinese-American saying that they are more or less Westernised. Other than their racial characteristics they had very little of their community's culture and thinking. On the other hand the mainstream teachers blame her for her backwardness: ““You ought to develop yourself socially as well as mentally”” (*Woman Warrior* 196) reminding her of absorbing more

American ways. But if one is conscious of continuously imitating the West then one also tends to look down on oneself. Moon Orchid when she comes to visit her husband in America after a gap of thirty years finds him Americanised and ghost-like. She says that, her husband “looked like one of the ghosts passing the car windows, and she must look like a ghost from China. They had indeed entered the land of ghosts, and they had become ghosts” (*Woman Warrior* 153). The cultural shock is what Moon Orchid experiences. Realising her husband has changed she feels lost and terribly exiled. Deborah L. Madsen says: “ghosts generally signify separation” and that “ghostly separation can represent cultural alienation too” (247). Americanisation has alienated Kingston from her Chinese community.

The fair complexion, assumed to be an asset, of the mainstream Giovanni describes in negative terms. She says: “I know the first times (sic) the Africans saw white people they thought the whites were dead . . . were ghosts . . . and the Africans thought them uncivilized” (*Prosaic* 550). Though the mainstream represented themselves as gods worshipped by ethnic minorities, there is no truth in such beliefs as understood from Giovanni’s words. In the case of Allen she is looked upon as an outsider in the land of her birth and with terms dictated by an outsider. By partisan, uni-polar ethnocentrism, the mainstream creates boundaries that are cultural markers distancing themselves from minorities.

It is education that empowers Giovanni, Levertov, Kingston and Allen bringing them autonomy and literary skills to express themselves. Giovanni says: “The power of speech, the freedom to engage our hearts and our bodies in dialogue is the most precious freedom of all” (*Prosaic* 282). Their clamour for freedom reminds us of Sartre’s hero in

The Age of Reason who is “condemned to be free” (qtd. in Lavine 360). They are condemned to take a bicultural/multicultural stance for life. They cannot escape the collective historical experience of oppression which is based on their difference in ethos. They do not seem to sever the psychological umbilical chord. Michel-Guillaume-Jean De Crevecoeur asks what then is the American, the new man:

He is either an European (sic), or the descendant of an European (sic), hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. [. . .] *He* is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds.

(qtd. in Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 75)

Thus hybridity challenges single identity. Even as the mainstream feels only Anglo-Americans are the real Americans, immigrants assert to take their place in the American national fabric. Ethnic identities try to make their readers understand what it means to be ethnic, what it means to be American and what it means to be ethnic American. And from these three evolve “a type of American” called Chinese American, Afro American, Amerindian, and Jewish American. Giovanni has a different way of explaining her hybridity. She says:

I am an american (sic) Black. Period. The rest is of no particular interest to me. Afro-American, African-American, whatever. I am not a hyphenated American, regardless of what others define themselves. [. . .] For me, the noun is Black; american (sic) is the adjective. (*Prosaic* 424)

Allen is torn between two identities. She illustrates her hybridity as she states in “Dear World”:

I know you can't make peace
being Indian and white.
They cancel each other out.
Leaving no one in the place. (*Skins and Bones* 56)

Of all the four writers she is the only one who sees little good in the mainstream culture that robs her land, and is guilty of both intellectual and political apartheid. The half-breed's world is a reality just like the dawning of the truth that purity of race is a rare commodity. The real owners of the American soil are the red Indians; they are deprived of their homes and made to live like secondary citizens. Yet on account of mixing they have white blood and still are relegated to a menial position. Allen describes in “Myth /Telling-Dream /Showing”:

the indian woman is cursed with lupus.
a blood disease. in which your blood
devours you. (*Life is a Fatal Disease* 48)

According to Indian concepts a “half-breed” as perceived by the Native Indian is blamed of being a traitor and is alienated from the tribe. Allen is a hybrid who describes the anguish of struggling against herself like a person suffering from lupus because she is not pure Indian. Full bloods reject mixed breeds. This position of theirs is a reality since they are to a great extent Americanised. Postcolonial writers create texts that write back and question the values taken for granted by the once dominant Anglocentric discourse of the imperial epicentre. Despite being a multicultural writer Allen advocates Native American

literature which the mainstream is slowly erasing. She describes herself as: “A little of this, a little of that: a person is made up of too many pieces, a patchwork quilt” (*Off the Reservation* 209). But from all this she takes her Indian descent which is matrilineal. It must be remembered that when Allen says she is American it should be accepted in the truest sense of the word, for Native Americans are the only real Americans. She says: “We are here to testify that our traditions are available to us, and that we continue to resist obliteration either of our cultures or our personhood” (*Spider* 2). They had to ward off colonisation at all levels and remember they are Indians. As hybrids, ethnic identities try to experience self-fulfilment. Kingston says:

[. . .]Chinese and western culture (sic) really are so different. We are actually at opposite sides of the planet. And I don't want one of them to destroy the other one. I don't want to become an American by wiping out all my Chineseness. Nor do I want to stay Chinese and never participate in the wonderful American that's out there. So instead of destroying part of myself or denying some of reality, to me there has got to be a way to have it all and to do it all. (Skenazy 156)

A close scrutiny of immigrant suffering will throw light on the reasons for their bicultural stance. For this, one must contextualise these writers. Representing Chinese Americans, Kingston seems to regret her community ideals. She would like to be progressive and egalitarian. The paradigm shift is obvious. While the old immigrants consider thrift as virtue, the younger generation follows the American trend of comfort and good living. They abandon old customs especially those that are merely ritualistic and not utilitarian. Kingston says that, “[. . .] we were lucky we didn't have to have our

feet bound when we were seven” (*Woman Warrior* 9). Previously one could not marry outside one’s community. Slowly they started choosing their own marriage partners. Kingston remarks that marrying a Caucasian ensures an easy upward mobility. In *The Fifth Book of Peace* she says: “One reason you espouse yourself to a White person: access to more of the world” (71). Kingston proved this by marrying Earl King an American actor by profession. Not only is an upward mobility possible but also different world views make one more tolerant and cosmopolitan. The resultant minority voice accepted by the majority audience becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for the former.

In the case of Levertov one notices it is after her marriage to American writer Mitchell Goodman that she comes to America. In fact most of the Black Mountain writers were her husband’s friends. So it was easy for her to follow the tenets of the Black Mountain poets without formally attending classes. In the case of Giovanni she prefers to bear a child out of wedlock rather than to play second fiddle in marriage. It is her womanist stance that makes her opt for motherhood rather than marriage. Allen has experimented with marriage four times and prefers a lesbian life today.

There is a conspicuous generation gap between parents and their children among immigrants. This intergenerational gap can be illustrated. Kingston narrates an incident in *The Woman Warrior* of how she had a pill for a bad cold and her mother thought she was on to drugs. She tries explaining to her mother and says: ““That wasn’t LSD, Mama. It was just a cold pill”” (100). In the parents’ generation the cardinal virtue was filial piety. And one’s clan is one’s first responsibility. Kingston says: “All the village were kinsmen,” (*Woman Warrior* 11) and the father is treated like a demi-God. But American

traditions place emphasis on easy camaraderie between father and son. An illustration of this is cited here. A father receives a letter:

Dear Pop,

gotta run back to school for the game

Need my black shoes for dance tonight

be a sport and polish them for me. Polish in upper drawer. Thanks.

(Sung 151)

In the case of Allen any attempt at Americanisation creates, a breach in the relationship with the tribe resulting in hybridisation. But today there is no pure Indian. She describes this in the poem “The Last Fantasy”:

On the streets people passing –

new Indians with crazy light eyes and ruffled hair,

mad karmic loafers waiting for the last bad trip –

watching all the changes go on down [. . .] (*Coyote’s* 9)

The Chinese are made to feel inferior because they are evaluated by the social mores of the American psyche. The Chinese have been speaking in disgustingly loud, strong, bossy and unmodulated voices, according to the mainstream. Living amidst Americans, Kingston confesses that she has grown up feeling her voice is disgusting. So Kingston, as a part of growing up, becomes silent out of self-consciousness. Slowly she practises to become American feminine. “We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine. Apparently we whispered even more softly than the Americans” (*Woman Warrior* 172). Aware of holding a secondary status in America,

ethnic identities worked hard to ape the Americans and to keep abreast with changes in the American environment, and ended up being even more different.

Sociologists say that the nuclear family is undergoing great stress in America. Too much of emphasis to individualism has given rise to broken homes, unwed mothers and single parents. But ethnic identities practise the extended family which is neither the joint family of their past nor the nuclear family of the mainstream. The Black family is accused of declining to which Giovanni says, “We are not deteriorating; our structure has always been the extended family – many generations living under one roof” (*Prosaic* 158). Ethnic women have a difficult time because of unrealistic expectations of them, and the inflexible roles that they play. The old structures of authority are being questioned and eroded. Individualism has even entered their married life calling for an equal partnership. The idea of “old family” and descent are slowly losing its significance. People give up old ways to go up in life. As Daniel Bell in “Ethnicity and Social Change” suggests:

The attack on authority goes hand in hand with broader currents in the culture: in the arts, the denial of standards of judgment, and the destruction of the idea of genre; in the value system, the denial of respect for age and experience, and the argument that since society is changing so quickly the old do not know as much as the young.

(qtd. in Glazer and Moynihan, *Ethnicity* 149)

Generational conflict is inevitable as the children of immigrants found themselves caught between the ideals of their parents and the American conditions. The concepts of the familial relationship have not survived transplantation to the American soil in the

traditional sense. Yet, family feeling is a strong ethnic trait. Giovanni feels one must be responsible for one's family members, when her grandfather dies Giovanni empathises with her grandmother's loss and sense of helplessness. In "Gemini" she says: "I felt like an impotent dog. If I couldn't protect this magnificent woman, my grandmother, from loneliness, what could I ever do?" (*Prosaic* 15). She takes it as a responsibility to look after her grandmother though the mainstream looks upon the older generation as a burden or an obstacle in their way to progress. Having come from a close-knit family she knows the importance of the family in shaping a personality. The American idea of a nuclear family is not acceptable to them.

Though Kingston too subscribes to the extended family idea it is different from the case of Giovanni. She describes in *The Fifth Book of Peace* how she and her brothers and sisters take turns to look after their parents. Among ethnic identities the extended family has grandparents and siblings as members of the family. In the case of Kingston her mother often comes to stay with her, and sometimes she visits her widowed mother. Even her niece Cher Nicolas, who is finishing her graduation at California, is staying with her. Kingston cannot write without her mother's "talk stories". Kingston says: "She wants to stay a couple of weeks, maybe forever, and live with us in the temporary house we just bought. I always fall in with her time and uproar" (*Fifth Book* 249). The obedient daughter still continues to be so but not in the servile manner of the past. Her hybridity has made her more rational, balanced, mature and aware of the times.

The first generation wishes to return to their Old Country. Kingston's parents have always wished to go back. They feel guilty that they have broken ties with their families back home. To illustrate this Brave Orchid says: "I want everyone of you living

here together. When you're all home, all six of you with your children and husbands and wives, there are twenty or thirty people in this house. Then I'm happy. And your father is happy. [. . .] That's the way a house should be'" (*Woman Warrior* 107-108). But Kingston accepts America as her home and wishes to make room for an extended family rather than the nuclear family concept of America.

One observes in *The Fifth Book of Peace* that Kingston's mother remembers what her husband told her before he died. He had told her: "'You go back to China. Americans don't cherish old people. You take the money and go back to China, where you can buy slave girls to take care of you'" (27). Though often the old generation is sidelined in American family life Giovanni thinks differently and feels that one has a lot to learn from the old generation. She says: "We younger people should recognize that the older generation didn't survive all these years without some knowledge" (*Prosaic* 89-90). The new generations tend to reject the parental ways. One reason is their first hand awareness of the parental ignorance and inability to comprehend new ideas and values. Another reason is that they are drawn towards their role models of mainstream parents and children who enjoy a lot of independence. This friction leads to a hybrid's perception. More and more Chinese are becoming Americans or rather Chinese Americans. Their writing is called Asian American literature. Elaine H. Kim has defined Asian American literature as:

Literature written in English, during the last hundred years by Chinese, Filipino, Japanese and Korean American writers concerning their identity and experience in the United States [. . .] Asian American literature reflects the Asian experience in the United States, which has been shaped

by American racial policies in the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Exclusion and anti miscegenation laws, social and economic segregation, relocation and internment and the Civil Rights movement provide the complex social context of Asian American literature. (41)

Multiculturalism is the offshoot of the unstoppable march of man towards progress and the process used is from being to becoming indicating changes, adaptations and confusion of duality. When he/she writes he/she writes from this duality, and thus emerges multicultural literature.

Many Chinese immigrants after coming to the new land either changed their names or were given new names. They were often made to feel ashamed of their own cultural ways, and name changing is only an indication of one of these changes. In *The Woman Warrior* Kingston describes how they changed their names upon reaching America. “The Chinese I know hide their names; sojourners take new names when their lives change and guard their real names with silence” (5). Kingston again says: “Chinese readers know me as Tong Ting Ting” and Americans know her as Maxine Hong Kingston (*Fifth Book* 50). But Kingston’s mother Brave Orchid, refused to change her name or learn English. Her father changed his name but Brave Orchid never used it.

Among the Native Indians their Indian names were translated into English under pressure as well as willingly as a token of their new-found admiration towards the mainstream. Allen says that since the tribal names seemed difficult to Anglo-Americans many Indians gave up their Indian names or had two names. Even Pocahontas’s name was later Lady Rebecca. This title she got from her father who was king and not after her husband John Rolfe who was a widower. Behind the process of colonizing the land the

mainstream colonized their names too. Those names difficult to pronounce they changed, which is symptomatic of psychological colonization. Even as precious a thing as one's name is abandoned for the sake of the new master. This indexes the ethnic's fascination for the mainstream culture.

Many Afro-Americans upon their arrival had to change their names. They were brought to this country and sold into slavery, were stripped off their names and were forced to take the names given to them by their new masters. And the dilemma of the hybrid was in retaining both names representing partial identity.

Ethnic identities cannot perceive themselves as emerging from a single culture but as an expression of a double bind. This apparent state of being condemned has its redeeming aspects as well. Because the ethnic is drawn towards the mainstream they stand to benefit much even as they lose their grip on their own ethnic value system. Their gain on the one side is balanced by the loss on the other. Yet the process of experiencing duality can be excruciating emotionally. In Chinese community a compliment is to be rebuffed or negated whereas according to the mainstream a compliment is to be accepted and thanked. Kingston's character Moon Orchid is amazed when the child she compliments thanks her. "'Thank you', the child said. When she complimented them, they agreed with her! Not once did she hear a child deny a compliment". All the same Moon Orchid feels: "They were capable children; [. . .] But they were not modest" (*Woman Warrior* 134). This sign of accepting could be real or pretentious. They are torn between the duality of Sartre's being that is being for itself (a conscious being) and being in itself (objects of which I am conscious). On the one hand they are conscious of all that is happening to themselves, all the injustices they had to suffer. On the other hand they

are conscious of the things or objects around. For the Native Indians land is sacred and cannot be possessed. But the mainstream looks at land, man and things to be possessed. Allen says: “Western civilization are: proprietorship (ownership as a concept)”. For Native Indians land can be used like money but not owned, because Allen says: “I can only relate to land or money as a living thing, because I am living and because relationship is process (sic)”. But they do not understand “how a piece of land could belong to someone in some absolute sense by virtue of a piece of paper” (*Off the Reservation* 18-19). So for a hybrid a bicultural situation creates an emotional battle which is fought by generations of ethnics in one way or another.

The mainstream is at the centre and enjoys all the rights and privileges to wield the staff or scepter of authority. And according to the white mainstream urban renewal is a sign of progress. But the ethnics perceive it differently. Giovanni, whose grandmother lost her home to urban renewal, feels disoriented in her new home. She says: “Something called progress killed my grandmother” (*Prosaic* 11). As a part of Americanization, Kingston also reveals her anger towards her crippling Chinese society as well. But on close observation Kingston begins to rationalize for herself, and realizes who the real enemy is. When her parents lost their space for a laundry to a parking lot she is full of anger and vengeance. She says: “When urban renewal tore down my parents’ laundry and paved over our slum for a parking lot, I only made up gun and knife fantasies and did nothing else” (*Woman Warrior* 48). Kingston recognizes Americans as her enemies. She says, “From the fairy tales, I’ve learned exactly who the enemy are (sic). I easily recognize them – business-suited in their modern American executive guise, each boss two feet taller than I am and impossible to meet eye to eye” (*Woman Warrior* 48).

Chinese Americans suffer trying to keep their ethnic identity intact as far as possible and from not aping the Whites, or for being different from the mainstream culture. Within them there is a push-pull between the emigrants' "invisible world" and "solid America". But after much deliberation they accept this double identity within themselves. What they see represented in texts they wish to counter. The body of work of ethnic identities is an attempt to develop a reading method to understand gender, race and class and to deconstruct the fossilized superiority of mainstream America through texts. They also resist representations speaking from a hybrid perspective. Giovanni remarks: "A people can be oppressed, but it takes individuals to seek freedom" (*Prosaic* 469). Thus they re-open closed and demarcated boundaries by expressing in a new voice their perceptions. They imply new directions in the analysis of ideological relations between mainstream America and ethnic minorities.

In an alien soil for ethnic minorities their skin and physical features make them stand out. Besides, mainstream ethnocentrism makes them conscious of their colour and this feeling followed them throughout their life. They suffer alienation because their natural and rational ability to express is injured. It finds expression as a part of hybridization. Giovanni says:

I've always known I was colored. When I was a Negro I knew I was colored, now that I'm Black I know which color it is. Any identity crisis I may have had never centered on race. (*Prosaic* 37)

Even Levertov is conscious of the discrimination ethnic minorities suffered. In the poem "The Long Way Round" Levertov expresses the discrimination she sensed:

what it must be to wake each day

to the sense of one's own beautiful
 human skin, hair, eyes, one's
 whole warm sleep-caressed body
 as something that others
 hated,
 hunted,
 haunted by its otherness,
 something they wanted to see disappear. (*Life in the Forest* 54-55)

Socially the Chinese are unacceptable to the mainstream according to Kingston. Standing on the platform Wittman Ah Sing an actor who reads out lines in Kingston's novel about mongoloids reveals the mainstream's poor image of the Chinese:

'What's wrong with the baby, doctor? !' 'Is it deformed! ?' 'Is it
 Chinese?!' Interbang? ! Interbang! ? 'But *we're* Chinese? !' 'He's
supposed to look like that!?' 'How can you tell if it is defective or if it is
 Chinese? !' 'Look at its little eyes.' 'Its tongue's too long.' 'Yellow skin
 and yellow jaundice? !' 'It's mongoloid? !' 'It's mongoloid !' 'It's an
 idiot!' (*Tripmaster* 31)

They are made to feel that the features they have inherited are defective and are of real low quality. They have no choice but to accept it. It is just like several things about the mainstream that an immigrant does not like and accept. The European immigrants have a choice whether to assimilate or not. But, the subalterns have little choice. In spite of coerced assimilation in varied ways they are reminded of their difference.

The mainstream's marginalization of ethnic identities makes them conscious of power relations. Just like the immigrants the Native Americans are also victims of segregation and different kinds of injustices. Being fellow sufferers they can easily relate themselves to one another. They see through the mainstream's disguise of making immigrants feel that they are inferior. They slowly shift the focus of the panoptic gaze on to the mainstream. By doing this they leave them in a disadvantageous position. They all undergo the spasms of change and get exposed to the pulls and pressures of hybridization. But later generations realize how dependent the mainstream is on them, and they start dictating terms. Giovanni says: "Power only means the ability to have control over your life" (*Prosaic* 46). They feel the power within them to make and break power hegemonies. Whether it is acculturation, assimilation, the melting pot theory, or cultural pluralism the recognition of power relations is very important. This may be analysed in the light of Michel Foucault's views. Foucault in *Power/Knowledge* talks of power flowing through the capillaries of men. Power according to Foucault is "something which circulates" (98). Ethnic identities exert the power within them to assert their hybridity. Kingston realises she has to assert herself, if she wants to follow her interests and have an identity. Foucault's interest is in seeing how "mechanisms of power have been [. . .] invested, colonized [. . .] by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global dominations" (Foucault99). When men have power in their hands they become assertive. Even when pushed down the hegemonic ladder, men or women who experience power in their hands will want to resist. The colonized or the ethnic identity needs a catharsis. Only that can give a solace to them. And that cannot come without resisting

violence at the political level. This can also result in decolonisation of the mind as revealed in the writings of the authors under study.

An interior monologue goes on with boundaries in mind of these writers. Gloria Anzaluda (1987) refers to “mestiza consciousness” (qtd. in Mohanty 80) meaning a consciousness of the borderlands, which is a plural consciousness of both borderlands. It requires understanding multiple, often opposing, ideas and knowledge, and negotiating this knowledge. Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen can see ambiguities and contradictions, and act collectively with moral conviction. At some point, on one’s way to a new consciousness, one has to leave the opposite bank; the split between the two is to break down the subject-object duality and to transcend that duality. Gloria Anzaluda says:

The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (Anzaluda 78-80)

Imbibing from community, mainstream and individual experiences they move from national boundaries to international boundaries. They form a new hybrid identity that is independent, goal oriented, self assertive, rational, logical and judicious. Today ethnic identities make the mainstream aware of being dependent on them.

Kingston’s move has been a slow growth from a feminist hating patriarchy yet slowly maturing and learning to love men, who like women have feelings, and

advocating a “sangha” (*Fifth Book* 397) of multi-racial people. Though Kingston says: “I learned to make my mind as large, as the universe is large” (*Woman Warrior* 29) her perceptions become large only with *The Fifth Book of Peace* where she is able to visualize a world community. She is able to transcend all pettiness for she feels one must develop talents for forming communities, indicating it is not easy to do this for one’s mind has to be large. Her ethnic origin and her gender hamper her identity. She transcends these boundaries by finding herself between these enclosures and taking off from that point to assert her individualism. In *The Fifth Book of Peace* Kingston’s mother wanted a “sangha” a community house, comprising her Chinese folk. But Kingston does not wish to stop with a “sangha” of Chinese people, since she has universal concerns and wishes for a “sangha” of multi-racial people.

Apart from the ideological vision of a unified human race there is another phenomenon occurring worldwide. Owing to globalisation different races, ethnic groups and social segments get evolved in emigration/immigration process. Jobs, education, trade and commerce all seem to be strong compulsions for this extraordinary transplantation of persons from one cultural milieu to another. Thus the “sangha” concept is found materialized for very worldly reasons and without much reference to the ideological dream of the global family.

Individualism is a negatively valued trait in the Native Indian society. In all stories one finds the isolated person reconnecting with the community. Allen says:

Right relationship, or right kinship, is fundamental to Native aesthetics.

Right relationship is dictated by custom within a given tribal or cultural

grouping, but everywhere it is characterized by considerations of proportion, harmony, balance, and communality. (*Spider* 9)

Exposure to individualism and Americanisation has brought changes to ethnic identities. Kingston, Giovanni, Allen and Levertov are writers who from their immigrant ethnic backgrounds have propelled themselves forward in a conscious effort through their writings to reiterate American individualism. Hybrids show loyalty to their community and to American individualism. In the Western concept this feeling of loyalty is redundant. For the first generations and folks back home the community is very important. And for later generations American individualism ushers in defiance which permeates in all their actions. Eventually individualism makes one realize that one is responsible for isolating oneself from community life. So like Americans, Chinese Americans are also very lonely. Kingston explains in *The Fifth Book of Peace*:

I am in America, a lonely place. I am lonely. Gone are the days when clans of women ground corn together, and slapped tortillas, and patched a quilt and danced the hula. They washed their clothes together in the river; now one waits alone at the Laundromat. Alone, I make one joong after another. (252)

Americanisation has taught them different values. The next generation has not fully realized the depth of family ties and bonds, since generational conflict is inevitable as the children of immigrants find themselves caught between the ideals of their parents and the American conditions. But the next generation is inspired to be modern, materialistic and not traditional. This causes a loosening of ethnic ties. Besides,

geographical distances also pave the way for the same process resulting in enhanced hybridity.

Kingston keeps her community at bay, and preserves only its rich traditions and values. She claims to be out and out Chinese American. She realizes that her physical characteristics and community values will always make her stand out. *Brave Orchid*, Kingston's mother represents the voice of the community. Kingston says: "My mother has always busied herself with telling me my life's task: the education of America and the entire world" (*Fifth Book* 242). Her mother encourages her to talk of her Chinese culture and thus preserve it. Through her works she preserves community proverbs, rituals teachings and Chinese culture. While all along Kingston believes she is preserving culture and educating the world through her books, her mother blames her for telling her community's immigration secrets. This is yet another dilemma that Kingston faces of doing something with the intention of it being good but community accepting it as resulting in negative consequences. *Brave Orchid* says:

"You endanger them. You tell immigration secrets, and ruin families. [. . .]

You tell on them. You point them out."

So they read me, they hate me. They think I hate them, and snitch on

them. [. . .] I make money off of (sic) Chinese people's hard lives.

(Fifth Book 55)

She feels they would be caught and deported. So Kingston without her mother's knowledge photocopies it and keeps the original back where her mother hides it. Kingston decides to store the immigration scroll as a valuable document that a library can utilize. As a Third World woman she feels she cannot do much. On the other hand

Kingston knows that the racist eyes of the mainstream will look down upon her attempt, yet as a hybrid she is more rational and broad in outlook than the first generation.

Kingston's father came in his teens to America but always yearned to go back. This is the case of the first generation. He came to America to make money and not to get acculturated. As migrants they came, to make it up the ladder of success, for this they were looked down with contempt. They were conscious of their differences from the mainstream. And later these differences resulted in Kingston's hybrid identity. Kingston says: "I wrap my American successes around me like a private shawl [. . .]" (*Woman Warrior* 52). Raymond Williams discusses how ideological contradictions could fuel resistance. Moon Orchid's husband came to America and got americanised. His is a case of Americanisation. He came to America and forgot his family back home, and remarried. He explains this saying: "It's as if I had turned into a different person. The new life around me was so complete; it pulled me away. You became people in a book I had read a long time ago'" (*Woman Warrior* 154).

In the women writers under this study there is a conflict between old and new life styles, world views, customs which is the strain of their Americanization. From subservience, silence, and erasure they have found new economic independence and confidence. This augurs well for the paradigm shift.

Thus, the dualistic mental make-up of the ethnic becomes an integral part of hybridity. This may be illustrated thus. The stereotyped notion upheld that beauty is only what the mainstream decides – white American beauty has undergone a change to include beauty concepts from amidst other races. In fact Americans or Whites struggle hard to get a tanned look which is an essential part of looking beautiful.

Legends and tales are a great part of native psyche. For the mainstream only fair complexioned women are beautiful. Native Indians resist this by declaring yellow woman or yellow corn woman to be beautiful. There are stories connected with her complexion which is a sign of beauty. Just as pink and red are the colour among Anglo-European women yellow is the colour for Native Indian women. In an interview Allen says: “The color of femaleness is yellow, and at Laguna a woman’s face is painted yellow with some red spots when she dies” (Eysturoy 21). Yellow Woman or Kochinnenaka is a supernatural woman featured in rituals and traditions. Allen reveals through “The Sacred Hoop” “I am Kochinnenako in Academe” (6) and how the feminine forces are at the centre of the world. And how from Kochinnenaka is “Yellow woman who leads the way from winter to summer, from myth to reality, from darkness to understanding in Keresian myth and ceremony” (Milspaw 27). She is at the centre of this world, of the sacred hoop. Allen is able to bring the reader to a deeper understanding of the common world of American Indian tradition which is different from the mainstream’s. She shares her urban vision quest with cross- cultural observation.

As a part of decolonising, realizing Chinese worth, Kingston accepts her Chinese ethos and identity. Aware that Chinese eyes are not beautiful Kingston portrays through her character Wittman Ah Sing, the efforts made by Chinese women to appear beautiful. Wittman describes how women who feel ashamed of their chinky eyes are busy trying to make their eyes look big so that they will not be recognized easily. He says: ““And that’s why you girls are slicing your eyelids open, isn’t it? Poor girls. I understand. And you glue on those false eyelashes to give your scant eyes some definition”” (*Tripmaster* 312). He goes on to say, ““I have been requesting my actresses to take off their false eyelashes,

to go on bare face and show what we look like. I promise, they will find a new beauty’” (*Tripmaster* 312). There is no longer the need to advocate the white mainstream idea of beauty. Even the Chinese are beautiful themselves in their own right. By emphasizing on Chinese beauty Kingston comes up centre.

As part of aping the mainstream Blacks try to improve their complexion by becoming fairer and possessing blonde hair like the Whites through straightening, wigs and colouring of hair. Giovanni like many writers before her, advocates black is beautiful. Her bicultural identity refutes the use of wigs or any such thing to ape the mainstream. Donez Xiques in her assessment of *Gemini* says that Giovanni “admonishes the black community to beware of wearing ‘wigs’ and to get their own thing together” (184). She knows like Frantz Fanon that however hard a Black man tries to don the white skin he will never be accepted on equal terms.

Immigrants to America do not get the recognition that they are full fledged Americans. They are often treated as cultural outsiders. As a Chinese-American, Kingston is individualistic and rebellious. Kingston struggles between the two cultures to find her identity. There is always a conflict between these two ideals. As Werner Sollors says, America is a history of immigration. And the Chinese like many others have contributed a great deal to the making of the American society. Hence Kingston demands for the Chinese, American recognition. Speaking to Arturo Islas and Marilyn Yalom, Kingston stays: “No, we’re not outsiders [. . .] this is our country, this is our history, and we are a part of America [. . .] If it weren’t for us, America would be a different place” (qtd. in Skenazy 25). In *China Men* she describes how Chinese immigrants came to America to build the railroads. Many of them died while making them. She explicitly

describes their saga of suffering pining for home. Chinese immigrant women came qualified with no special trade. Because of an Exclusion Act passed, women were banned to come to America for a very long time. So, the story in *China Men* is all about these immigrant men and their travails – how they were homesick and emotionally and physically were yearning for their women. Several years later the ban was lifted. That is why Kingston describes how a man delivers because many women disguised as men came to America as stowaways and by other illegal means. “Or the men of those days had power to have babies” (*China Men* 236) when women were banned in America. Today, hybrids who were once at the periphery, group together under the national identity – American. They have similarities and dissimilarities in their experiences. Kingston tells Timothy Paff: “The mainstream culture doesn’t know the history of Chinese Americans, which has been written and written well. That ignorance makes a tension for me, [. . .]” (qtd. in Skenazy15). The bicultural Kingston acts as a translator or an intermediary between Chinese American history and mainstream assumptions, between Chinese folk tales and American popular culture, thus augmenting the process of hybridization.

Most critics get tied down to the concept of cultural pluralism while dealing with the American scene but considering the vital and crucial contributions of the immigrant ethnic groups, it can be safely said that they have had a very important role in “the making of the people of America”. This has been achieved through a multi-faceted process of acculturation, adaptation and assimilation of values, attitudes or behaviour patterns over the centuries leading to a new hybridity, which is very vibrant as reflected in the development of the nation. Yet the voice of dissent, resistance and open rebellion

may be heard from time to time as echoed in the writings of the authors under this study. Historians go “beyond pluralism” and address the grand theme of “the making of the people of America”. Out of the fusion and the confusion of the American identity both the native born and immigrants feel foreign in America. In urbanized America there has been no American culture readily available for acceptance. It is a picture of varied cultures coexisting learning to incorporate the other selves. Their identity being dual or multiple it is a continuous search for an “American” identity through their interactions with others. The recognition of the American identity as a heterogeneous one, thus, becomes inevitable.

Working through and with their dualities ethnic identities seek and find their destinies. The collective unconscious makes them feel they are different, and individual experiences make them wish to recharge the psyche by investing primordial symbols called archetypes in the texts. To recharge one’s energy level, Kingston falls on the myth of Fa Mu Lan. However hard immigrants try to conform to American ways, their cultural past will not let go and vice versa. Kingston through Wittman, an Asian American in *Tripmaster Monkey* expresses how he is never allowed to be himself and to feel at home as a Chinese American. His collective unconscious comes in the way of Americanisation. Carl Jung mentions the collective unconscious as a repository of repressed content. Having left his homeland years ago the ethnic identity carries his past as repressed feelings to prevent Americanisation. Once in a while this surfaces whether one likes it or not. Besides one’s physical characteristics, even certain typical behaviour patterns reveal a part of the collective unconscious. Living in an alien land one has to have the drive of wanting to live or to give some meaning to one’s existence. Wittman tries to become

American but his Asianness makes him stand out. Through their characters, writers of ethnic identity express how they are never allowed to be themselves and to feel at home. They suffer from alienation which is self inflicted because of their collective unconscious, of being different, and because of society.

In *Tripmaster Monkey*, Kingston makes use of parody as mimicry or imitation. She imitates the thing parodied yet reveals the difference from the thing being parodied. Wittman Ah Sing is a Chinese American aping mainstream Americans. He is a postmodern man who feels fragmented on account of the angst of existence. Kingston reveals his hybridity as an American hero with Asian features and an Asian last name. He is an actor/activist and the director of his own theatre in San Francisco. Through him she establishes a forum against racist reading of Chinese Americans. Wittman is a multicultural hero in his attitudes and dress. He is a hippie with long hair and a green coat. He wears goggles to hide his chink eyes and speaks like a typical fifth generation Chinese American. He feels lonely, suicidal and alienated.

Wittman knows that Nanci Lee his schoolmate is a Chinese girl fortunate with very good looks so she can pass off as a non-Chinese. Wittman has grown up with a complex that his Chinese looks prevent him from doing well in life. As Wittman meets Nanci Lee more than a year after graduation, over coffee, he says: “It would pain a true Chinese to admit, that he or she did not have a community, or belonged at the bottom or the margin” (*Tripmaster* 10). While Nanci Lee behaves like a non-Chinese, Wittman reveals his multicultural entity. Living in mainstream American environment they feel haunted by their own racial characteristics. But they very well know that they cannot be typically ethnic like their communities back home. Whether one likes it or not ethnic

identities experience a warring self at several levels. The writings of ethnic writers under discussion reflect ethnic values with American elements. To the mainstream an ethnic identity is inferior since he is not Eurocentric.

Americanisation leads to the fermenting effect of the mainstream. Community values, and indoctrination of false beliefs make one conform blindly, erasing one's capacity to question and reason. T. Z. Lavine opines in *From Socrates to Sartre* that philosophers say "[. . .] reason has been fettered throughout history by the greed and the lust for power of certain identifiable historical groups" (187). The mainstream is questioned by hybrid ethnic identities who find a voice when truth sets them free. Kingston tells Donna Perry that, "[. . .] it's the same struggle to break through taboos, to find your voice" (qtd. in Skenazy 177). The dilemma of making the first step to question the mainstream, using its own weapon against it, is a turning point in the attitudes of ethnic identities.

Kingston explains in all her novels how Chinese immigrants never stopped feeling inferior and alienated because of their looks, superstitions and cultural beliefs as a group of people who "landed in a country where we are eccentric people" (*China Men* 9). The cold shoulder that they received from the mainstream crippled their self esteem. The trouble springs for these hyphenated Americans when in American life their ethnic identity is defined in negative terms of rejection.

Biographical details are used to highlight certain points exclusively for the purpose of analysing Giovanni's views. A close study of her writings reveals that she comes from a middle class background. She feels responsible for herself and her people. Giovanni is more conscious of her rights than money. She remembers the sufferings of

her ancestors as slaves and on plantations. They quilted and kept themselves occupied as an act of survival. She says: “[. . .] gaining strength in those churches built penny by penny from folks who were insulted daily while washing clothes and floors, hopping bells in hotels though they had college degrees, being called ‘boy’ though the gray in their hair belied the summons. We had dignity in segregation and we must achieve dignity in Freedom” (*Prosaic* 270). Giovanni writes working against the myths that belittle Black Americans to come up centre.

Black women are known for their strength and stamina. Giovanni says in *The Prosaic Soul of Nikki Giovanni*: “We Black women have obviously underestimated our strength” (183). And they are more broad-minded. “I’m glad I understand that while language is a gift, listening is a responsibility” (*Prosaic* 389). Blacks are pictured as proverbial idiots who are lazy. This is a myth working against them and of great help to the mainstream. Giovanni says:

No slave was ever lazy; for he would not survive. No slave ever shied from hard work; for he did as he was told. No slave was ever stupid – uneducated, certainly, but never stupid; for he not only had to understand what the overseer wanted but what he would settle for. (*Prosaic* 278)

It must be remembered that Black migrants to the new World came not out of free choice but unwillingly. Blacks know that Americans cannot do without them, but they assert their identity not as Africans but as Afro-Americans. Giovanni says: “If white Americans think about it they owe us a lot” (*Prosaic* 198). But the fact is that they prefer not to mention it. Black Americans are now conscious of their contributions to the making of America. Giovanni says in *The Prosaic Soul of Nikki Giovanni*: “We do

also know America could not be the same without us” (279). In the course of assimilation they have lost their native language, cultural roles and much of their ethnic identity. But the process of hybridization has resulted in their becoming a new people with a new song.

We worked together, showing both ourselves and others that ethnicity is not a necessary ingredient for human relationships. We accepted new gods and found unique ways of worshipping while building tolerance for those who believed differently and those who did not believe. We were slow to judge as we understood that the burdens of mankind weighed differently upon different shoulders. We cultivated the land, built the bridges, painted the portraits, laid out Washington D.C., performed the first open heart surgery, separated the plasma from the blood, made the first shoes lasts, (sic) and did more things with a peanut than anyone could imagine.

(Prosaic 279)

But more than all this what they stood firmly for Giovanni says is, “[. . .] that every man is equal in the sight of God and must be respected under the Laws of Man” (*Prosaic 279*). Today, ethnic identities make the mainstream aware of being dependent on them, that they make the former aware that they owe them several debts and put pressure on the mainstream Americans.

Hybridization or partial Americanisation is a cultural and intellectual colonization. Consciously and unconsciously immigrants assimilate. And for Giovanni, Levertov, Kingston and Allen Americanisation has made them respond through the mechanism of neo-colonialism and discourses when “truth” dawns on them. There is an

inversion of harshness and reversal of paradigms. Americans place a premium on creativity and originality. Races get shocked at the novelty of the American. By asserting they have shaken society from a narrow perspective and broken down the divisive borders of world sisterhood. They have fought erasure and stereotyped representations of them.

It is true that ethnocentrism causes inferiority but it must be remembered that this inferiority is an obstacle and also a stimulus to new possibilities of achievement. But later generations show more fight in them after living on American soil. Virginia C. Fowler presents Giovanni: “As a poet who equates the survival of her people with their ability to use the only thing left them, their “human voice” [. . .] (“Introduction” *Collected Poetry* xxii-xxiii). Their sufferings have given them a humane disposition which the mainstream lacks. To some extent empathy is what women share all over the world though their experiences are different. Giovanni goads her people to unite and empathize with their fellowmen since, “It’s got to be the most emotionally devastating thing to know you are not needed” (*Prosaic* 337). One is not needed by one’s community back home because one has been away too long and one is unacceptable to mainstream Americans. So the will to go on and survive any dilemma is to, “[. . .] believe we are the masters of our fate” (*Prosaic* 340). So they realize if they stand passive they will be erased, so they decide their own fate not paying heed to mainstream Whites and taking pride in their Blackness. And they know hegemony is achieved by playing upon the common sense of people. When this common sense is blended with practical consciousness the people begin to think for themselves. Afro-Americans voice through Giovanni: “We do also know America could not be the same without us. There are legitimate Black complaints that in

the Middle passage we lost our native language, our cultural roles, much of our ethnic identity. We also became a new people with a new song” (*Prosaic* 279).

The dialectics between ethnocentrism and ethnicity gives rise to hybridity. American culture has a different set of values when compared with those of the immigrants. For example the dress code is more relaxed than elsewhere. It is in the different set of values that the rub comes. When immigrants first come they want equal treatment, since this can give them justice but what they receive is discrimination. Then they settle for tolerance and kindness and in turn receive rejection from the mainstream. When their ladder of expectations is not achieved, the opposite happens. That is, when ethnic Americans decide to be Westernised in clothing and use English then they are giving up some other ethnic value once treasured in their memory chip. They reject one aspect of one culture and accept something else of the other culture. This change may be a matter of convenience and a part of acculturation. Hybridisation is biological, social and cultural, and at the deepest level it is psychological because it involves emotions. And this is the experience of all the four writers – Giovanni, Kingston, Levertov and Allen. An individual remembers experiences unique to him and often this shapes his perception of the world. These experiences can be from his past memory or from what is encountered in daily life. Often the process of acculturation itself is unconscious. And hybridity emerges from this.

Ethnic identities show fidelity to their past and present, and judge the world objectively, but their past and present interfere in their objective description of their experiences. It is not something one can wish away. The ethnic minority awaits the

kindly gaze of the imperialists. And it is the mainstream subjectivity alone that causes the other. Giovanni in “Poem” in her Collection *My House* says:

we are all imprisoned *in the castles of our skins*
 and some of us have said so be it
 if I am in jail my castle shall become
 my rendezvous (46)

She claims that she will gain strength from her belonging to her race and people. She takes great pride in her Black race. But the mainstream uses Blackness to pick on Blacks, so that Blacks would be ashamed of themselves. But, Giovanni describes this in another way. She says: “It’s the lack of class this nation is showing” (*Prosaic* 199). She blames the mainstream for lacking integrity. The dilemma of being Black and American at the same time she suffers with great anguish, and identifies herself as an Afro-American. Ethnicity surfaces and is culturally beneficial when those whose identities have been submerged assert with pride and give vent to it.

Yet if one looks at the annals of history one sees that every social group needs another group to hate. As Freud said:

[. . .] It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness.

(*Civilization and Its Discontents* 114)

Ethnocentrism has made the dominant mainstream blind to its follies. They have been measuring minorities by their own standards. Giovanni finds this a frustrating experience. It is this frustration that makes her more articulate as revealed by her in the

poem “Straight Talk”. She says: “An acorn to an ant / is the same as a white man to a Black JOB” (*My House* 32). She says that on one hand the mainstream belittles the Black man whereas, on the other hand the White man is helpless when challenged to do jobs like the Black man.

For the ethnic identity surviving amidst the mainstream is not easy. They live through a working fear, suspicion of white domination and rejection. They face great resentment. Besides they do not like giving up their own cultural traditions. Pride of race and sparks of feeling could not be hidden for too long. In a bicultural world, ethnic identities have become more realistic and balanced. They have battled the racial attitudes they experienced, and through their powerful writing have caused a revolution.

The American culture is a composite culture with contributions of different kinds, and so concepts of interdependence and hybridity is noticed. Speaking vicariously Giovanni is aware that the race can be mind binding and retarding in effect. Giovanni in her poem “Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day” expresses:

i strangle my words as I do my tears
 i stifle my screams as frequently as I flash my smile
 it means nothing
 i am cotton candy on a rainy day
 the unrealized dream of an idea unborn [. . .] (*Cotton*23)

Giovanni finds words welling up inside her to articulate her emotions but she is sometimes put off by the mainstream’s views of Blacks. The preconceived notions of the mainstream affect the Blacks self-esteem. Yet, Giovanni dreams of an identity for herself,

and because of it not being realised she begins to feel the stirrings of dislike towards the colonizer, and wishes to assert her hybrid identity.

An ethnic minority experiences loneliness out of a feeling of not belonging. Giovanni tries to reconcile to this. She takes refuge in the beliefs, which she tells Margaret Walker in an Interview: “If you cannot give integrity to someone it is because you do not think of yourself as possessing it” (*Poetic Equation* 58). Such is the case of the ethnic minority who has gained strength from the awareness that since the mainstream does not possess integrity they cannot give it to anyone. So, better than waiting for respect from the mainstream, is to assert oneself demanding to be heard. As a result Kingston, Levertov, Allen and Giovanni turn to writing to transform themselves as bicultural writers and to free themselves from further complexities.

One can rebel, assert, and voice inarticulate silences but to move the mainstream obliquely and passively is the best and permanent resolution and way to freedom. Writing and re-representing Black ideology is the best form of individuation and decolonisation. Nikki Giovanni tries to revive individuality within the Blacks in her poem “Concerning One Responsible Negro with too much Power”:

i only want to reclaim myself
 i even want you
 to reclaim yourself
 but more and more i'm being convinced
 that your death
 responsible negro
 is the first step

toward my reclamation [. . .] (*Black Feeling Black Talk* 53)

The Weltanschauung of Black women is projected by Black women writers. They want the Black folk to become aware of their individuality to revive the blackness within them and the Americanness which they have imbibed. Similarly, each writer of ethnic identity will project a Weltanschauung from his own perspective. Giovanni speaks of moving towards a universal outlook where no prejudice lingers and all people sing and live in harmony. In *Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea* she says:

One day looking for prejudice to slip . . . one day looking for hatred to tumble by the wayside . . . one day maybe the whole community will no longer be vested in who sleeps with whom. . . maybe one day the Jewish community will be at rest . . . the Christian community will be content . . . the Muslim community will be content at peace . . . and all the rest of us will get great meals at Holydays and learn new songs and sing in harmony. (1-2)

The Africans were bought and brought and remained slaves until 1860. They had to fight against a dominant system. There were more interactions but the dominant ruled the roost. Contributions of the Black are not accepted by the mainstream. But Giovanni speaks of their contributions both American and Black. Giovanni declares that being Black does not make her not crave for love since first she is a human being. And this craving is a universal one. But the mainstream is so full of their own selves that they do not wish to reach out and touch others. She describes the love of Black folks as a kind of reaching out, in the poem “Love: Is a Human Condition”. She wishes to touch the hearts of people. The paradigm of change that Giovanni speaks of is “touching” through words

the minds of the readers, observer and listener, which will lead to true revolution. In

“When I Die” she says:

and if ever i touched a life i hope that life knows
that i know that touching was and still is and will always
be the true
revolution [. . .] (*My House* 37)

As a Black, Giovanni is revolutionary and often radical. As an American, Giovanni is individualistically womanist. And as a bicultural she matures into realising that touching the minds of her readers is the best revolution. Giovanni focuses on the contributions of the Blacks. American individualism exposes her to the idea of a global world. The English education has helped her to preserve Black sentiments through writing and it has gained a wide readership.

American society has attempted to crush all ethnic dissent. To resist the power of white mainstream America the ethnic identities have become aware of their self worth. This triggers a feeling of possessing power which makes them resist the mainstream representation and domination.

Giovanni defies middleclass convention. She feels the power within to do what she wishes with her life. She believes that “we are the masters of our fate” (*Prosaic* 340) so unless Blacks fight zealously for their rights they will not feel the power. “Power only means the ability to have control over your life” (*Prosaic* 46) says Giovanni. Unless you wield your power you will not feel it, she says in her poem “The Laws of Motion”:
“Black people are no less confused because of our / Blackness than we are diffused because of our / powerlessness” (*Collected Poetry* 211). Giovanni ignites the fire of

revolutionary zeal in her people because American individualism has made her conscious of the power vested in her. She says that if Blacks do not rise and strike, then Whites will strike, and only then Blacks will realize. So she is trying to bring about awareness among the Blacks through her works.

All human beings want to fulfil certain wants. Their attitudes develop in the process of want satisfaction. Sigmund Freud in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* opines: “it requires something other than the conscious counter-resolutions to overcome the unknown; it requires a psychic work which makes the unknown known to consciousness” (135). Man’s attitudes develop as he develops. Many of the most potent wants of individuals pertain to the enhancement and defense of the self – the want of prestige and the want of superior status. Man relating with man is yet another want. His life intersects with the lives of others. Megan Marshall says, “Logically, you would assume we would pool our human resources: we share the same planet . . . But we seem to regard each other as alien and exotic creatures, alternately loving, fearing, and manipulating each other, rather than dealing with the central paradox of our relationships: men and women need each other, but they often don’t operate on the same principles” (49). Even ethnic identities want to belong since they experience alienation from community and the mainstream. In the case of Giovanni, marginalisation is not a personal experience but she feels alienated from American tradition since the contributions of African Americans are not acknowledged. In *Racism101* she says, “It is inconceivable that I feel alienated from Western tradition; my people have contributed so much that is vital and good to it. I am alienated from the *people* who call themselves white, who think they own Western tradition” (181). The inner battles, dilemmas, ethnic people face at

every juncture are not just mind teasing but split them up into two, arresting progress and mobility. It robs them of the zest to live, and saps their vitality which is essential if a human being is to go on, not just living, but functioning efficiently. In the poem “Forced Retirement”

i could say i am black female
 and bright
 in a white male mediocre world
 but that hardly explains why
 I sit on the beaches of st croix
 feeling so abandoned [. . .] (*Cotton* 28)

Writers of ethnic identity want to be acknowledged because they are enveloped by feelings of otherness and alienation which they experience all along life’s journey. The journey of these ethnic identities is not just physical, but mental and emotional. The writer takes the reader into confidence and makes him/her feel the marked difference at the social, cultural, psychic and religious level. The transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber examines how one creates “a persistent alienation from ourselves, from others, and from the world by fracturing our present experiences into different parts, separated by boundaries” (142).

Like the Existentialists, what the ethnics feel is a double alienation: one is the geographical distance or physical alienation, and the other is psychological alienation with the mainstream institutions dominating their life. Allen says:

To be sure, American Indians are not the only people who suffer
 alienation in the modern world, but they are among the most beleaguered,

the most wounded by it. For, like the protagonists in their novels, and like the speakers in their poems, they live in a land that is no longer their home, among strangers who determine, senselessly, the patterns of their lives. (*Sacred Hoop* 146)

She goes on to confirm that Native American writing is brewed with anger and a sense of nostalgia. Their rage is against the Whites for contaminating their pure tribal culture on account of forced acculturation. Cultural erasure has led to both alienation from tribal community and minority status from the mainstream.

Allen is a strong advocate for the preservation of Native American culture. The theme of the dying Indian is mentioned by the mainstream American. By choosing to focus on their own traditions and to merge American literary forms with tribal ones, Allen has created more positive images of Indians. In the process, Allen shows how much adopted traditions have enabled contemporary Native American writers 'to resist effectively both colonization and genocide of the imagination' (Hanson 44). She contributes in making the world at large aware of the autocratic ways of the mainstream wanting to erase Native Indian culture; and also proving that cultures thought to be inferior could often be richer than the culture trying to erase it. Allen voices the mainstream influence on her in derogatory terms, and makes a zealous effort to highlight Laguna culture. Allen has always, through her texts, tried to reconstruct Native American's lost glory. In the third part of the poem "Suiciding(ed) Indian Women" she talks of a woman from the Navajo tribe, a segment of the pan Indian society. If she marries outside her tribe she will be caught on the horns of a dilemma all her life. So she cautions her to get away:

but how divide yourself
 from your flesh? Division
 does not come easy
 it is against the tribe
 laws which only few honor [. . .] (*Shadow* 130)

The Whites are presented as tyrants who have stolen land and meaning from the Indian lives. Allen describes her life as one on the margins of the mainstream and Indian. The full bloods reject mixed breeds, and the mainstream is racist. Yet she describes Native American life in convincing ways. *Shadow Country* shocks us of Indian modernism. Cowboy Indians slouch with cigarettes, dark glasses, and beer cans. In the poem “Los Angeles, 1980” she speaks of “The death culture swarms / over the land bringing” (*Shadow* 39). She continues: “The dying generation moves purposefully: / well dressed in Jantzen and Wrangler / Gucci and Adidas, clothes, bodies” (*Shadow* 40). Through her works, she warns Indians of Americanisation, since Native Indians, “are people caught between two cultures” (*Sacred Hoop* 135). Non Indian writers have portrayed the Indian as merely aping the West whereas Allen is trying to find the authentic Indian set against the background of his original culture.

Ethnic writers are children of two worlds. Their existence and experience bear testimony to the glorified writers they have become. Despite their exposure to other cultures there is rooting for something very precious. Their biological or cultural similarity to their group gives them a sense of belonging. But it is a sense of belonging to both the groups at the same time that is creating problems of identity. As Allen says in “Myth / Telling-Dream / Showing”:

and then there's the indian woman
 who hates in herself what is white.
 says she sees it like vomit. like
 a crippled withered leg she must drag
 with her everywhere she goes. (*Skins and Bones* 59)

But the pull of mainstream culture, which she lives amidst, is a reality, which she cannot disown. She accepts her dual identity with great difficulty. So, when her tribe alienates her from their group she reconciles herself to her divisive state of being ethnic and American.

Allen being a half-blood Native, has enjoyed the benefits of living in a matrilineal Laguna society where she does not have to fight for her rights. But with the passage of time and conquest of the Native Americans by the mainstream, everything traditional is being erased. Along with it there is a move from the matrilineal to the patrilineal. Today she stands up for Native American culture, helps in its spread and is a feminist herself. The more one gives up the past for the present or tries to erase it from one's mind the more one tends to remember it. Still further, Allen says something similar in "Grandma's Dying Poem". She says that more of one's grandmother or the past stays with one than gets erased:

you realize – your life has been
 a mirror of her ways, the reflection
 slightly different by small changes
 time and fashion make. When
 her place is empty, do you move in? (*Skins and Bones* 62)

The “you” she means is a mix of the old and the new which is Allen, the Native Indian. But being a half- breed she doubts whether she can replace her grandmother’s place. Writers of ethnic identity create a world as they see it. Readers can easily be won over to their line of thinking by the imposing presence of the author in texts and their convincing versions. That is why Kingston tells Jody Hoy: “we create the world by our way of seeing and knowing” (qtd.in Skenazy 52). Ethnic identities try to reawaken the world that has made them. Levertov, Giovanni, Kingston, and Allen reveal in their works that the past remains with them but it is not the past alone that makes them what they are. One’s identity does not come with the skin, blood and behaviour that one has inherited alone but is also a conglomeration of one’s present environment, community, work and value systems. The eye, which was a “constricted” one once, from a national and regional space makes a re-evaluation of the past as it moves forward to the present. But that does not mean these writers follow the mainstream codes and deny their past or jump out of their skin (Mohanty 92). On account of exposure to Western ways and self-reflection these writers undergo a deep sense of awareness of their differences from their sisters back home. They refuse to allow guilt to trap them, within the boundaries of an ethnic or white identity, since they wish to define themselves. They have to speak of their past to emphasize the gain from change. It is no longer a narrow, constricted perspective but a worldwide view. They find that they are the judge, the martyr, preacher and peacemaker. Yet their relations to the people and things of the past shape these writers’ constraint to liberation, and the past leaves traces that are constantly reabsorbed into a shifting vision.

In a hybrid there are traces of several cultures. And change is not a simple escape from influences. Allen’s case is typical. She reabsorbs traces of the past and forges a new

hybrid identity. On her paternal side she is influenced by Christian values and her maternal side is influenced by her Native Indian heritage. Living in the mainstream Allen began in some point of time to be averse to their values like individualism, at the expense of community bonding. Allen ridicules mainstream representation of her culture, and asserts her ethnic identity. Even Levertov never feels helpless or powerless since she is convinced that her Hasidic faith gives rise to a way of life, which is far superior, to what mainstream has to offer. Her Eurocentric descent, deep faith, advocacy for a war-free world and popular support for advocating her ecological philosophy have made her what she is among the mainstream.

In relations of power the current relation between the mainstream culture and the ethnic immigrants is a hegemonic relationship between the dominant and the minority. The advocates of the melting pot theory would only love to see ethnic groups erased. Even though the marginal groups claim themselves to be “Americans with a difference” the mainstream culture is not fully willing to accept them. It is exposure to the American scenario that has made ethnic identities empowered. As a result the ability of these writers is to articulate a politics of resistance. They do not think their ethnicity is just an essence but a representation. It is upon self-actualisation that they define an essential indefinable gene oriented biological self beyond language and society.

There is diversity in the composite self. Writers of ethnic identity look at themselves through the eyes of the others as well. And when they do so they disapprove most vehemently. They are represented as butts of ridicule or pity or exoticism. Every individual sees things as he does because of environment and society, his physiological structure, his wants and goals, and his past experiences. They also look at themselves

through their own eyes. With the former they develop an inferiority complex and with the latter they assert their identity. They are torn between the two feelings. There is a continuous feeling of fear and paranoia whether they have been loyal to their respective groups and cultures.

Binary opposition brings mixed feelings. Goethe says in *On the Nature of the Psyche* “the highest joy of man should be the growth of personality” (qtd. in Jung 70). The ethnic identities bring about a fusion of the two cultures, forging a new identity. The characters they project in their works are emotional cripples, shorn off the patriarchal trappings of power and authority. For them two worlds, diametrically opposite, collide, then converge and coalesce. The liberated ethnics of this world egg their characters on to be more spontaneous.

The curiosity and thirst for adventure of job seekers, freedom lovers, bought and sold slaves, are what instigate migration. Being face to face with another culture results in an osmosis of cultures. It is the attitude of the mainstream towards minor cultures that leads to assertion of identity and reflection of dualities. The writers chosen for this study are bicultural/ multicultural and have experienced marginalisation by the mainstream. They suffer dualities at several levels. Duality is the name of any theory which claims that there are two ultimate and irreducible components in the subject to be explained. Allen, Kingston, Giovanni and Levertov live border lives and have no fixed identity. They belong neither here nor there. This results in living face to face with dilemmas. The dilemma of duality is to be transcended and the split has to be healed by giving them a space of acceptance from which to speak. The bicultural faces the dilemma of belonging. So home is the space which allows them to be bicultural. And this is the American soil

which allows them to adjust their past with the availability of the present. The push-pull factor of the polarity of their existence is an integral part of their identity, and cannot be overlooked.

One way of avoiding essentialising identity is the refusal to accept the fact that cultures are holistic or pure. If cultures are accepted to be intermingled, identity becomes a discursive product. When there is an intermingling of races, and no definite border can be drawn between races, one can say that the borders have become porous.

Even when ethnic identities think they belong to a community, they do not mean their racial group but to a group of hybrids like them. These hybrids are either bicultural or multicultural hence there is sameness in their sufferings, experiences and difficulties. They feel they are understood better in this group of hybrids rather than in their early communities. Globalisation has eroded the national feeling to a great extent. These writers of ethnic identity have reconstructed a new nationality as a result of their duality. Their present is what concerns them as they move forward in a kind of double-single nationality – the ethnic American. Home, to Levertov, Kingston, Allen and Giovanni, is not just a geographical boundary but a mental space or mental boundary that makes them feel comfortable and gives them an at home feeling. It is a melting pot of emotions, feelings, sensory space, geographical space and historical space. In one's own original land one is Jewish, Chinese, Native Indian and African. But in America one is an American Jew, Chinese American, Amer-Indian and Afro American respectively.

Their vision is also a transformed vision where the problems of the colour line, which they faced, would be erased and in its place a world with multiple identities would surface so that one's colour and ethos can never reveal any one single past. They see a

self, anchored in multiplicity, that is, multiple-self. This is exactly what T. S. Eliot meant when he said that we are in the present because of our past. It is not something one can wish away. So the past and the present mix and their attitudes change. They lay bare their minds in front of their readers. Giovanni expresses in the poem “Fathers”:

my people have suffered
 so much for so long
 we are pitiful
 in our misery
 we boost our spirits
 by changing our minds [. . .] (*Cotton* 49)

By including ethnic and American elements Kingston occupies the subject position advocating peace. She is against the mainstream’s idea of warfare. Kingston refers to the Oakland-Beverley fire of 1991 and says in *The Fifth Book of Peace*:

I know why this fire. God is showing us Iraq. It is wrong to kill and refuse to look at what we’ve done. [. . .] We killed more children than soldiers. [. . .] For refusing to be conscious of the suffering we caused [. . .] God is teaching us, showing us this scene that is like war. (13-14)

She remembers the fire in which her house got burnt. “That day, one house burned every five seconds. Seeing it the next morning, it brought me back to the shock and horror of Vietnam” (*Fifth Book* 14). It is only after suffering that one can talk of peace. The first line of *The Fifth Book of Peace* says: “If a woman is going to write a Book of Peace, it is given her to know devastation. I have lost my book – 156 good pages” (3). On being asked by Jody Hoy “What is the lesson you would like people to learn from your book?”

Kingston says, “I want people to realise how large and marvelous the universe is and what a shame to blow it up” (qtd. in Skenazy 64). Having combined peace loving Buddhist ideologies and experiencing ill effects of war the hybrid Kingston changes from a woman warrior to an advocate of peace.

Levertov has a strong social conscience and commitment. She suffers an ideological and spiritual loss. It is the Vietnam War that first opens her eyes to mainstream racism. Levertov, Kingston, and Giovanni are writers who from an individualistic attitude move to a communitarian or a global attitude. Megan Marshall says, “For the human self does not exist in isolation. We must find others to care for, and who will care for us, making ourselves full member of a community with far greater boundaries than the professional world” (49).

What the past holds for ethnic identities is myths, legends and rich traditions and conservatism. What America has to offer is cosmopolitanism, progress and better standards of living. Imbibing both, they have a better world view since they have undergone both cultural experiences. Giovanni says in “Gemini”: “What I am saying is that the original man, the Black man, related to nature and tried to live within it. The white man tried to fight it” (*Prosaic* 120). They have evolved a new synthesis of traditional values and mainstream ethics to forge ahead carving a new identity.

CHAPTER IV

GYNOSOPHIC RELATIONSHIPS

*As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no
country. As a woman my country is the whole world.*
– Virginia Woolf *Three Guineas*

Paula Gunn Allen, Maxine Hong Kingston, Denise Levertov and Nikki Giovanni engage in their writings the double discrimination that women undergo – gender wise and racial. They question the stereotypical images of women presented in literature and worse still, the images of ethnic women represented. They work towards the elimination of gender injustice in society and help women to pursue their rights. They assert their identity revealing gynosophic relationships, that is, a new, womanly perspective on relationships with their community and the mainstream. This may now be illustrated briefly: Allen for example resists the mainstream stereotype of an Indian – the Indian as a noble savage, dressed in hides and feathers with a painted face. Through the Western gaze one sees only the blood thirsty warriors and demure squaws. Allen says in her poem “Pocahontas To (sic) Her English Husband, John Rolfe”:

you wondered at my silence, saying I was
a simple wanton, a savage maid,
dusky daughter of heathen sires
who cartwheeled (sic) naked through the muddy towns [. . .]

(Skins and Bones 9)

But these stereotypes are not the real Indians. Even Giovanni ironically illustrates the stereotyped notion of women that society has, that women are imbued with more patience

and tolerance and that they are expected to obey as revealed in the poem “All I Gotta Do”, “all i know / is sitting and waiting / waiting and sitting / cause i’m a woman” (*Collected Poetry* 112).

A woman is deemed a woman only when she adheres to what patriarchy expects of her. Feminists note this to be an outcome of the patriarchal view that gender is a social construct – “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 295). There is universality in women’s subordinate position in society. These writers are aware that women have always been labelled as weak, emotional and powerless. Ethnic women are hyped as all the more powerless since they are racially discriminated by the socio-economic systems of the mainstream.

Being radical in outlook, these writers try to break the stereotypical roles. For example Nikki Giovanni starts out as a radical. She does not approve of marriage. As she says: “‘Marriage is give and take – you give and he takes’ [. . .] Somebody has to give and somebody has to take. But people set roles out; though the better you play them the more useful you are to that person” (*Prosaic* 174). Giovanni fulfills all the traditional roles she has to play, but refuses to be caught in wedlock. She believes that “Marriage is not a female institution because it does so little good for women” (*Prosaic* 537).

In her own way Kingston also radically resists the stereotyped images of women. She says in *The Woman Warrior*:

I refused to cook. When I had to wash dishes, I would crack one or two.
 ‘Bad girl,’ my mother yelled, and sometimes that made me gloat rather
 than cry. Isn’t a bad girl almost a boy? [. . .] Even now, unless I’m happy,
 I burn the food when I cook. I do not feed people, I let the dirty dishes rot.

I eat at other people's tables but won't invite them to mine, where the dishes are rotting. (47-48)

Similarly, Allen is involved in gender movements on account of a “gynocratic consciousness”. Lagunas are matrilineal by descent yet women do not dominate their societies like men in mainstream patriarchy. It only means that femininity is their central cultural value. In Laguna culture women enjoy a high position and are foregrounded. The presence of women is essential in almost every aspect of Laguna life, even in rituals concerning men. Among Lagunas it is joked that women beat up men for dereliction of duty. But today there is a cultural shift, and men beat up women. Allen says: “Also, the white traders brought ‘fire water’ for the purpose of reducing the natives to comatose drunkenness [. . .] Many Indians became alcoholic [. . .]” (*Off the Reservation* 53). Owing to American influence Laguna men have begun to beat up their women. And so Allen wishes to fight for women's rights because she feels the mainstream has contaminated Laguna culture. But because of Western influence it is becoming acceptable to brutalize women and children and old people. Allen tries to reorient men to give women respect and not to coerce them like male chauvinists. It is observed that Allen is more of a radical today than before. She is aware that the mainstream women are fighting for rights and the Laguna women have lost what they enjoyed at some point in history. Looking at her ancestors Allen says that women used to enjoy a better position. After contact with European settlers there has been an erosion of values.

Though Kingston, like Giovanni, started out as a radical, slowly became more moderate. The feminism Levertov, Kingston, and Giovanni practise is liberal feminism, different from that of Allen, which is more militant. Liberal feminism believes that the

general subordination of woman is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that hinder the efforts, progress and success of women in this world. The male centred society falsely believes that women are by nature intellectually, physically less capable than men. As per the tenets of liberal feminism women do not give up their traditional roles and at the same time are not completely servile. It is observed in *China Men* that the mother supports the family when her husband falls ill. One sees an inversion of gender roles. The Chinese American mother alters traditional roles sometimes to “scold her husband into working” because of devotion to let the family go on and to save his face as breadwinner. She gives harsh counsel to wake him up as seen in *China Men*:

‘You’re nothing but a gambler,’ MaMa scolded. ‘You’re spoiled and won’t go looking for a job’. ‘The only thing you’re trained for is writing poems,’ she said. [. . .] ‘What use is any of that?’ ‘It’s a wife’s job to scold her husband into working,’ she explained to us. (246-47)

Giovanni is very unconventional, and lives as a single mother. She gives her son Thomas her family name, and puts an end to all queries when asked about her unwed status. Jean Gould quotes what Giovanni had to say in one of her interviews about Tommy’s birth in *Modern American Women Poets*: “I had a baby at twenty-five because I wanted to have a baby and I could afford to have a baby. I did not get married because I didn’t want to get married and I could afford not to get married” (333). This feminist answer prevents further probing of her private life. She prompts Black women to have babies so that they can have someone to love. But they should also have money to support them.

Levertov, at one point, is classified as a feminist though she never was a radical feminist. In the poem “The Wife” the wife speaks to her husband as a mere listener. Whereas in the poem “About Marriage” the wife’s attitude changes. Here, the wife speaks to her husband as a sharing partner confident of her individuality and demanding it. She says, “Don’t lock me in wedlock, I want / marriage, an / encounter –” (*Denise Levertov Poems 1960-1967*, 140). Levertov fights vehemently for her basic human rights and reflects the difficulty of pulling herself together after divorce from Mitchell Goodman. As Levertov in “Divorcing” describes how though according to her ethos divorce is not permissible yet she intends seeing if Mitchell and she can survive severed:

We were Siamese twins.
 Our blood’s not sure
 if it can circulate,
 now we are cut apart.
 Something in each of us is waiting
 to see if we can survive,
 severed. (*Freeing* 66)

Having suffered sexism and racism Kingston, Giovanni, Allen and Levertov fulfil major stereotyped roles not according to the mainstream social matrix but in their own fashion at the same time pursuing their own interests. So their hybridity has resulted in liberal feminism.

Feminism is a struggle to eradicate sexist oppression. Men encourage women to believe that they are valueless and obtain value only by relating or bonding with men.

Levertov describes male sexism in her poem “The Mutes” from the collection *The Sorrow Dance*:

Those groans men use
 passing a woman on the street
 or on the steps of the subway
 to tell her she is a female
 and their flesh knows it,
 [.]
 yet a woman, in spite of herself,
 knows it’s a tribute:
 if she were lacking all grace
 they’d pass her in silence [. . .] (*Denise Levertov Poems 1960-1967* 196)

What is implied here is that a woman is looking for male approval to gain identity. She needs to create a new space which is woman centred. She must be able to help herself and other women since her identity stems from asserting her individuality.

In Chinese communities women were not to question but blindly believe and follow what the clan tells them. Healey quotes Ammot and Matthaei’s views on the traditional Chinese woman who was expected to “serve first her father, then her husband, and, if widowed, her eldest son” (205-206). Kingston’s No Name Aunt did not toe the line and “combed individuality into her bob” (*Woman Warrior* 9) and was ostracized by the community. Kingston rebels throughout her childhood, unable to conform to conservative Chinese mores. She resents having to lie and says she has already eaten when offered food, instead of bluntly admitting, “I’m starved. Do you have any

cookies?”” (*Woman Warrior* 21) She keenly feels the unfairness inherent in great-Uncle’s pleasure in taking her brothers out for candy and new toys while refusing to take her and her sisters because they are girls – “maggots!” Chinese women must learn to make themselves more serviceable for their husbands and in-laws. The lot of Chinese women in general as depicted in *The Woman Warrior* by Kingston is deplorable. In conservative Chinese family life a daughter must not be individualistic but according to the mainstream, individualism is a right of every individual. This idea of the mainstream is sometimes empowering as seen in the case of Kingston herself even though the Western concept of individualism threatens the Confucian family values. Kingston’s merit may be reckoned in terms of her Chinese background. For this a brief analysis of the Chinese society is imperative. There is a difference in the original Chinese social set up and the way she looks at it. A close focus on traditional Chinese life is evident in Kingston’s works. Chinese women play a very servile role in Chinese society. “There is a Chinese word for the female I – which is ‘slave’” (*Woman Warrior* 47). Their private and public space is as limited as what is decided for them by the male members in their community. The Chinese man bears his allegiance first to the society, then to the clan and last to his family. A man in China is subject to domination of three systems, family, clan authority, and political authority. In the case of a Chinese woman she has all these overshadowing her and the dominant male also has a major role to play in her life. This can be illustrated by statements like “‘Girls are maggots in the rice’. ‘It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters’” (*Woman Warrior* 43). Married women either have a blunt hair cut or tie their hair in a bun. It is believed as described in *The Woman Warrior*, “a woman who tended her appearance reaped a reputation for eccentricity” (9). Kingston remembers the

sexist gibes which are responsible for her turn of mind as a part of her growing up. Growing amidst sexist gibes like: “‘One girl – and another girl,’ they said, and made our parents ashamed to take us out together” (*Woman Warrior* 46). All these indicate the position of women in Chinese life. Though there is the concept of machismo in mainstream patriarchy, White American women have a major voice and power in their families and culture but this is not so for Chinese women.

Kingston remembers her mother telling her how Kingston’s father was exchanged for a girl child, as her grandfather wanted a girl. But her grandmother made him return the girl and “made him trade back” (*Woman Warrior* 11) her son. But this lifestyle is unacceptable to Americanised Kingston. She wrestles within being a Chinese exposed to Americanisation and says: “I’m getting out of here. I can’t stand living here anymore” (*Woman Warrior* 201).

Community norms warn Kingston not to become like her aunt, since excessive indulgence in following one’s interests is always punished. No Name Aunt dreams and indulges in the bodily act which results in an illegitimate baby. For this she is treated as an outcast and her alienation leads her to suicide. Kingston questions Chinese orthodox notions knowing that, “Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examinations” (*Woman Warrior* 39). But Fa Mu Lan dresses as a male warrior and fights to save her village. After beheading the emperor she attacks the baron who drafts her brother. It is a great blow to the Chinese male ego to be defeated by a woman, even if the woman is disguised as a male. Kingston fights Chinese sexism and mainstream racism using the pen.

Native American's attitude towards women is different from the mainstream patriarchy's attitude to women. Patriarchy is to be blamed for interior colonization. Kate Millet considers gender difference to be, "the most pervasive ideology of our culture" (25) and states that through this system a most ingenious form of interior colonization has been achieved. It is one which tends moreover to be sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring. Allen's knowledge of feminism evolves from her life in the mainstream patriarchy. Even Christianity wields the heavy hand of Father God, and this privilege is extended to men-folk. Speaking of mainstream patriarchy Allen says: "Because men are extended the privilege of status, they rule "as gods" over the women in their households, if not in their province and notion" (*Off the Reservation* 75). They do very little to serve, respect or consider women as equals. Allen mentions the wife syndrome experienced in white mainstream culture. When a wife is connected to a husband in a higher status she can naturally possess some of the privileges he enjoys though she is always expected to be serviceable. Native Americans hope that by imitating the mainstream they would be more accepted. She says:

[. . .] many of us turn to those we see as possessing our self esteem in hopes (sic) that they will bestow it upon us, if not in fact, then by association with their superior social and political position, a kind of "status by association" that marks a mind-set created by acculturation in a dominant-submissive social system. This tendency is a disguised form of the "wife" syndrome, translated to the political, economic, and of social arenas. Those suffering from an analogous phenomenon in Indian country

are termed “apples”, a sobriquet for those who hope to recover their sense of self-worth by finding acceptance among whites through the adoption of white standards, mores, and beliefs. (*Off the Reservation* 76)

Similarly Native Indians dreamt in vain that by Americanization they could acquire several of the privileges enjoyed by the mainstream.

Giovanni in her life and texts reflects her Womanist (Black Feminist) concerns. She fights against sexism and racism in spite of not having experienced any major personal suffering of the kind. Yet she is vicariously hypersensitive to the cries that come from the Black quarters. Giovanni, of a fiery temperament, fights most vociferously for women against sexism. She says: “There is nothing so undervalued as women’s work” (*Prosaic* 341) in the world at large. But at the same time “If a man does any little thing at work, let alone anything extra, everybody goes to Hosannahs. But a woman is expected to do these things with no praise and in fact no notice taken. She will only hear about it if it’s not done” (*Prosaic* 343). By giving a feminist strand to her writings she advocates strongly against this injustice.

Women have been subjugated by being brainwashed to believe male constructs of the images of femininity and womanhood. These images have reached mankind through literature, and social and cultural discourse. Betty Friedan in her *The Feminine Mystique* says: “The core problem of women today is [. . .] a problem of identity — a stunting of evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique” (80). Coming from their respective cultures the social construct of what the feminine implies is deeply etched in their minds. And a lot is expected of them and they are taken for granted, especially Black women. In “Hands: for Mother’s Day” Giovanni says:

. . . WOMAN stood to free her hands . . . to hold her young
 . . . to embrace her sons and lovers . . . WOMAN stood to applaud
 and cheer a delicate mate who needs her approval. . . WOMAN
 stood to wipe the tears and sweat. . . (*Those who Ride the Night Winds 18*)

When women get into the rut of household chores they forget or give up their own likes and interests. This is more prominent among Third World women who behave like super women, self-sacrificing and self-effacing, even when patriarchy and women are against them. Giovanni says in “Linkage”:

What is a woman . . . to think . . . when all she hears . . . are words that
 exclude her . . . all she feels . . . are emotions that deceive. . .

(*Those who Ride the Night Winds 27*)

In all societies women have certain specific stereotyped roles to play. And in a patriarchy the role of women is never in an advantageous position since men make the norms, even for women. In “Racism 101” she says Black patriarchy propagates that women are to be possessed. Patriarchy spreads the idea that women suffer from penis envy. But Giovanni says:

European male, African male, Asian male, all sought freedom from
 women. All consider woman inferior. All fear the power of the vagina.
 Freud was wrong. There is no penis envy; there is vaginal envy. The penis,
 no matter what the myth, is an entity. No matter what its length or width
 for it is finite. The vagina is a space. It knows no boundary. (*Prosaic 537*)

Giovanni’s worth may be reckoned in terms of her African background. There is a difference in the original African social set up and the way she looks at it. This can be

better understood by glancing at the traditional African life that is reflected in her works. A close examination of the life and culture of Giovanni in the background of her Afro-American life is attempted, based on her works. Giovanni in “Sacred Cows . . . and other Edibles” describes how very little importance is given to women’s work:

We who stay home picking up smelly socks, making up tousled beds,
cleaning dishes, dusting furniture, planting flowers nobody sees [. . .]
we’re just so much garbage giving both our children and husbands, not to
mention dogs, cats and other pets, a false notion of our worth.

(Prosaic 341)

Giovanni raises her voice against being owned by someone and not being appreciated for the work done. In the poem “Woman” she describes how a woman puts up with a lot of differences: “she tried to be a book / but he wouldn’t read / she turned herself into a bulb / but he wouldn’t let her grow” (*Cotton 71*) and accepting her fate means reconciliation. Giovanni raises the question: why cannot sorority also be handed down. She questions: “The world is so boy-prone that, having had only a boy, women rarely think, To (sic) whom will I pass my sorority pin”? (*Prosaic 502*). Giovanni opens one’s eyes to the fact that only the patriarchal norms are handed down to posterity. And the irony is that it is done by women.

Giovanni focuses on the treachery of Black men when they evaluate Black women, using White women as their yardstick. Yet in spite of supporting and empathizing with their women folk Black women admonish them for not being like the uppity whites – assertive. White mainstream women have a comfortable life at the

expense of Black women. Giovanni explains this in the poem “On Hearing ‘The Girl with the Flaxen Hair’”:

He has a girl who has flaxen hair
 My woman has hair of gray
 I have a woman who wakes up at dawn
 His girl can sleep through the day
 His girl has hands soothed with perfumes
 She has lips soft and pink
 My woman’s lips burn in midday sun
 My woman’s hands – black like ink
 He can make notes, make her heart beat fast
 Night comes I want off my feet
 Maybe if I don’t pick cotton so fast
 Maybe I’d sing pretty too [. . .] (*Collected Poetry* 4)

The Black woman has a tough time passing through life. And at the expense of the White woman decorates herself and is soft and helpless. Giovanni tries to conscientise the Black woman about this, to make her stronger and to articulate new demands based on this dependency. Giovanni justifies her position to her male counterpart and drives home the pathos of the Black woman. Her need to explain the difference of the situations is to win over the Black man and to make known to him how unjust he is. Indirectly she is pleading if Black men join hands with Black women and fight the mainstream; things would be easier and different. Ida Lewis a friend of Giovanni in her Foreword to *A Dialogue: James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni* says: “I sometimes wonder how the gap

between the black man and the black woman grew so vast. We were both on the ships, in the fields, at the whipping posts, struggling in the city [. . .] How can the black man view the black woman as anything other than his rib?" (7) Giovanni is sensitive and appeals to the Black man to understand the Black woman's need for him. She describes the pathos of Black women living with the non co-operation of Black men. She becomes aware that her liberal feminist stance can transform relationships. She hopes that alienation, competition, dehumanization that characterize human interaction can be replaced with feelings of intimacy and camaraderie. Giovanni justifies Black men's unkindness to their women folk because of ill treatment from the mainstream. It follows a kind of pecking order. She describes this in the poem "Their Fathers":

someone said the only emotion
black men show
is rage or anger
which is only partly true
the only rage and anger
they show are to those
who would want to love them
and bear their children
and with them walk into the future [. . .] (*Cotton* 50)

The fight for human rights is a just fight since the Constitution states that all human persons have the same rights. So there is no reason for women to be treated as "the other" by men. In a patriarchal society male domination relegates women to a subservient role. Very often men violate these norms of human rights and encroach on to

women's rights, even if the woman is Mother Earth. Levertov illustrates this well. The mainstream believes in the Judeo-Christian concept of man being the cream of creation. In "What it Could Be" in *The Life Around Us* Levertov speaks of uranium discovered in Australia, Africa, and America which is used in nuclear technology and which has been known to the indigenous people of the land. Yet they have not disturbed the earth to ravage its bowels of uranium since the earth is sacred. But the White man for his own ends has violated laws:

Australia, Africa, America,
 wherever it's found is found an oppressed
 ancient people who knew
 long before white men found and named it
 that there under their feet
 [.]
 lay a great power. (*Life Around Us* 23)

Native Indian women are brought up to believe that women are strong and not silly and weak. But it is the mainstream culture that makes Allen aware that women are victims of patriarchal domination, and they are dependent on man for almost everything. Allen looks at the natural world to learn lessons of life. She finds a link between the natural world and women. She cannot visualize femininity to mean helpless and cute as in mainstream patriarchy. She tells Annie O. Eysturoy in an interview: "But to me femininity means these great craggy mountains and these deep arroyos and tremendous storms, because Mother Nature is after all feminine, right?" (Eysturoy16). And one cannot dream of controlling Nature because she is stormy. Allen, in her works,

metamorphoses stormy nature in terms of feminine strength and power. The perception of the poet instills in women a lot of self-confidence and self-awareness.

Allen does not feel that being a mother is easy. The typical expectation is that mothers are nice, tolerant and accommodative. It means giving up many things one likes. Allen feels that a mother need not always be nice, have to smell nice, or always cook good things and sometimes look shabby. Allen takes all her examples from nature. She says in her interview to Annie O. Eysturoy:

It is like that in nature, and you have to think about the larger picture, the whole, and what's going on around you. It has allowed me to notice parts of Mother Earth that I didn't understand before because I could have said that mothers are terrible people, which people in America love to say [. . .]

Have you even seen birds function with babies? They are not nice. (22)

Allen shatters the stereotyped image of mothers being always nice and serviceable just because they are mothers. She looks at Nature and learns sometimes how mothers need not always be nice. Sometimes one has to be not nice to convey a certain message. So she says being a mother leads her to Mother Nature and the mothering cycle, and finally reclaiming herself. Allen's work attempts to bridge the gap between both the native and the Anglo worlds of common experience, and by extension, between the feminist and other world.

In Laguna society "The system was traditionally female-centered" (*Off the Reservation* 80) whereas the mainstream and its Christianity reinforce the idea of patriarchy. So her consciousness is affected by ideas of the subordinate position of

women of mainstream patriarchy and Christianity. Allen says in the poem “The One Who Skins Cats”:

[. . .] I am the one who
 holds my son close within my arms,
 the one who marries, the one
 who is enslaved, the one who is beaten,
 the one who weeps, the one who knows [. . .] (*Skins and Bones* 14)

Able to enjoy an enviable position in the eyes of feminists Allen through Pocahontas describes the cultural change that marginalized her. Through her works she educates the mainstream of the rich cultural traditions, which the mainstream has plundered and is trying to wipe out.

Allen realizes that not only is her identity and social role a male construct but also that she has to subvert and demythologize male writings which seek to label her. America is her home-land yet she is hunted by a double oppression of racial discrimination and patriarchy. Femaleness or femininity is the central cultural value that she cherishes as a writer. Speaking to Annie O. Eysturoy she says:

I have never found a patriarchal culture in Native America, North or South. Never. I have found cultures where women appeared to be under the dominance of clan head men, but I have never found a culture where that meant that the men told the women what to do. In a lot of these cultures the older women told the younger women what to do, and the older men told the younger men what to do . . . You are never going to

find a patriarchy, is what I am saying. Absolutely never. There isn't any.

(Eysturoy 18)

Since she has been brought up with a female-centred view she experiences a constant internal conflict with mainstream patriarchy.

The surviving Native Indians are “half-breeds” who have been robbed of land, and forced to acculturate. Both the land and the environment are regarded as woman. The mainstream looks upon both to be possessed. This identification is there in the mainstream discourse too. But Native Indian understanding of land as feminine is placed within a different power equation. Allen says: “Western civilization was erected on twin pillars, so to speak: possessiveness and literacy” (*Off the Reservation* 20). Man in his subjugation has exhausted the environment and woman, and both tend to retaliate. The ethnic woman expresses boldly the injustice she suffers likening it to the environment which man is depleting.

Euro-Americans have violated the environment and land by their deeds and have caused an imbalance. Indians have a time-honoured concept of the earth as goddess – ‘Bhoomidevi’ as a divine entity. Even American Indians have this same feeling. In *Off the Reservation* Allen says:

The planet, our mother, Grandmother Earth is *physical*, and therefore a spiritual, mental, and emotional being. Planets are alive, as are all their by products or expressions, such as animals, vegetables, minerals, climatic, and meteorological phenomena. (118)

She remaps and renegotiates a new relationship of man with land and environment from a gendered and geopolitical view for altering the mainstream’s perspective. Allen calls

mainstream a “rape culture” attacking land, “woman-hating” (*Off the Reservation* 66) and giving women a secondary role. When Reservations are sites for nuclear wastes and experiments the environment or Mother Earth is being defiled and will strike back with retribution through disease, drought and natural phenomena. There is a connectedness in Allen and Levertov’s ideas with that of the mainstream’s. This is regarding the protection of environment on which the government has several policies but Levertov and Allen are reformists. Their perspectives have radical changes in them.

For Allen, land is the strongest link between her mother, grandmother and herself. There is a binding relationship between Allen and her native land as manifested in her works. This bonding with the land is geological spirituality.

Allen’s mother died in 1991 of lung cancer. Allen says that living in Cubero amidst nuclear testing, nuclear waste exposed her to a variety of chemical toxins emitted into the planetary biosphere. Allen’s mother slowly began to lose her health because of uranium dust from mines, air contaminating radioactive and chemical substances. She says:

So at Mother’s death I returned, an aging and grieving woman. Mother wasn’t there, only the wind [. . .]My mother climbed those mesas in her youth, like her daughter, like her daughter’s daughter, like our sons. They were much different mesas then, overlooking a different world.

(Off the Reservation 224-25)

In the return to land there is an implication to returning and acknowledging deep emotional bonds and relationships with her mother on the part of Allen. After her mother’s death Allen moved back to Cubero, her home town.

Even for Kingston her mother played a pivotal role in her life. Her mother's "talk stories" helped her to correlate her memory and imagination to write. So when her mother speaks of death she says: "I cannot bear for her to die. Mothers ought to be immortal" (*Fifth Book 26*). Kingston expresses her insecurity regarding a possible loss of her mother having just lost her father:

‘Don’t die MaMa. We can’t bear to hold another funeral right now. It’s a lot of trouble. Live a long time. Live to a hundred, MaMa. I want to be an old lady with a mother’. (*Fifth Book 26*)

Individuals cling to their families and regard the family as a source of strength and security. This is very true of Giovanni who lived with her parents, grandmother and son at a time when people were trying to live independent lives that they wished. Giovanni is extremely attached to her grandmother. She has been brought up by her grandmother, and her deep affection for the woman and her untold suffering are reflected in "Gemini". She says:

And love means nothing unless we are willing to be responsible for those who love us as well as those whom we love. That’s one reason I am always cautious in personal relationships, because people don’t just love you out of the blue – you let them. And people have loved me when I needed to be loved so as an adult I must give that love back to those who want it, or it all will have been for nothing. (*Prosaic 189*)

Giovanni has brought up her son Thomas with special care so that he learns to respect women, think of marriage as a shared responsibility, and be proud of his Blackness. She says: "It is an honorable calling: womanhood. And a wonderful thing

when we not only take up the task of gentling the spirit but passing our faith along” (*Prosaic* 502). One finds that a blend of the ethnic and American cultures complicates the mother-child relationship. Giovanni says: “I have always wanted to be a good daughter. I have wanted to make my mother and grandmother proud of me. I like to think I am a good mother; at least I know I did my best” (*Prosaic* 502).

Feminism started with fighting for rights and welfare for all women in all spheres. It helped them to maintain a healthy critical distance. It did not do much for ethnic women since they faced a double-pronged attack of being women and ethnic. Frustration from unfulfilled wishes leads to quests for ethnic identification. The feminine consciousness makes women realize that they are subordinated and they have specific needs which are unsatisfied. And only change can bring about fulfilment and so they assert themselves. As Giovanni in many ways airs her views, “Were I God, starting an ecosystem, I, too, would choose to put a Black woman at the center of my world with the surety that she would get things off to a proper start” (*Racism 101*, 150). The community’s sexist ways and mainstream’s racism made Giovanni’s suffering very concrete and personal. Giovanni writes about injustices dreaming of a time when survival is possible without sexism and racism, and only camaraderie of fellow feeling exists. She hopes to change her situation through writing.

Kingston tells her mother that she does not wish to be stereotyped. She does not want to grow up to be a slave or a wife. She expresses her defiance saying: “Ha! You can’t stop me from talking. You tried to cut off my tongue, but it didn’t work.” (*Woman Warrior* 202). So attempts at silencing her made Kingston all the more articulate.

Giovanni, Kingston, Levertov and Allen project how the interior colonization of women from the paradigm of a feminine mind has shifted over to normal thinking, resulting in feeling that women have a mind of their own. This process of decolonisation has been slow but steady. Allen says:

The way out of the Master's House of monstrosity, monopoly, monotony, and all his other mono's - unities, oneness that amount, in the end, to facism, (sic), to dictatorship, to tyranny, and to geno - (sic) and gynocide – (sic) is by way of a passionate, thoroughgoing, and, yes, uncompromising commitment to multiplicity, to the concept of difference.

(Off the Reservation 78)

So Allen asserts her Laguna identity. She is more radical than Levertov, Kingston, and Giovanni. Her anger is directed on the mainstream for their racism. Having lived in a patriarchy with a Scot grandfather and Lebanese father Allen grew up with matrilineal leanings since her mother is Native American. In Laguna culture women are foregrounded and there is an understanding of gender roles. So the role the mother plays in her life is pivotal. As she says in an interview: “The Lagunas are a heavily ‘mother right culture’ [. . .] But nevertheless, they’re woman-dominant; they’re woman-centered people, and that’s important to my work” (Ballinger and Swann 6). Allen says that the mainstream boasts of being a superior civilization but knows nothing of cultures older than it that existed in America and are far superior, because Native Indians practise it. Besides the rich Laguna culture that is woman centred is a model that White women are striving for. In “Who is your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism” Allen continues:

We as feminists must be aware of our history on this continent [. . .] I think this is the reason traditionals say we must remember our origins, our cultures, our histories, our mothers and grandmothers, for without that memory, which implies continuance rather than nostalgia, we are doomed to engulfment by a paradigm [. . .] (*The Sacred Hoop* 214)

Allen is the exceptional case of experiencing mother right theory – which is “matrilineal, matrilocal, and matrifocal” (*Off the Reservation* 80). She represents the Native American Laguna Sioux culture and its power structures, which may not be acceptable to the mainstream. The society being traditionally female centred means that: “It is from the Feminine that male power of all sorts derives, and the values upon which that civilization is founded are basically those of the feminine” (*Off the Reservation* 80). Every individual bears the title mother and membership in clan and family derives from the maternal line, as does property, right to planting or grazing, status in society and right to spiritual society. This is difficult for an outsider to understand. “In every tribal society, girls were trained in the mystical responsibilities that fell to every woman and were at least aware that special mystical states and responsibilities were privy to certain holy women and female ritual leaders” (*Off the Reservation* 47). The Native Indian tribes are all different in their cultural practices, yet they do not try to merge since they want to retain their identity with a local flavour. Women facilitate and maintain this situation by playing different roles. Allen says:

These ways include the way of the daughter, the way of the householder, the way of the mother, the way of the gatherer, the way of the ritualist, the way of the teacher, and the way of the wise woman.

(*Grandmother's of the Light* 10)

Among Native Americans “motherhood is shared among women who are siblings in clan based schemes” (*Off the Reservation* 89). The change from one stage to another is based on age and duties within the sacred wheel of life. They have a different idea about women ageing, the older you get the more respect you get. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac, Allen says:

My mother has always made fun of people who dye their hair or who try to hide their wrinkles or in any way try to alter the fact of how old they are. To her, the older you get the better you are – and the better life is supposed to go for you. You're more valuable. And so, of course, I'm the same way. The first few white hairs I got, I was just so proud of them. I was scared to death somebody was going to take them away from me. I like having all this white hair. It makes my life easier. (12)

Allen says that when any abuse against a woman is noticed, the old women band together. She says:

In other words, the women of the community took total responsibility for ending the crime that they recognized as directed against them all. They held men to the standard set by women, and by making community life women-centered, their safety and that of the entire community was ensured. (*Off the Reservation* 83)

Unlike Allen, Kingston's society negated the very existence of women. It is expected that women must be traditional and conservative. She is to live in servitude. As Beauvoir says in *The Second Sex*:

Now women have always been man's dependent, if not his slave, the two sexes have never shared the world in equality. And even today woman is heavily handicapped, though her situation is beginning to change. (xx)

What Allen, Kingston, Giovanni and Levertov are trying to say is similar to what Beauvoir remarks: "If women seem to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change" (*The Second Sex* xix). So Kingston the feminist warrior, to save herself from the mind binding ways of Chinese patriarchy, in her first novel *The Woman Warrior* advocates radical feminism. At one point as a part of passive resistance Kingston becomes quiet and unresponsive. This is interpreted by others as stupidity or servitude. If sexism that silenced women means submission or inability then this is a lack of interpretation of a woman's silence. Spivak says: "It seems to me that finding the subaltern is not so hard, but actually entering into a responsibility structure with the subaltern, with responses flowing both ways: learning to learn without this quick-fix frenzy" (qtd. in Landry 293). The female who remains silent is misunderstood as incapable of expressing herself when actually it is a mere failure of interpreting her silence.

Kingston is told when she does well in life it is for her future family's benefit. As a sign of indifference and rebellion she stops studying and doing well. They think she is retarded and can be married off quickly. But then Kingston refuses to accept her mother's choice of husband and retaliates by being smart, clever, and deciding for her herself. She says:

Not everybody thinks I'm nothing. I am not going to be a slave and a wife.

Even if I am stupid and talk funny and get sick, I won't let you turn me

into a slave or a wife. I'm getting out of here. I can't stand living here any more. (*Woman Warrior* 201)

Being a feminist means "a rejection of the traditional manner of female fulfillment-motherhood" (Sevenhuijzen 13). The feminism one comes across in *The Woman Warrior* is not radical feminism, in the sense that none of the characters deny the traditional role of wife, or mother, though they fight for equality and identity.

Kingston, Levertov, Giovanni and Allen move from the margins to the centre (not displacing men but sharing with them), which is absent in mainstream patriarchy. Amidst Native Americans respecting genders is giving each its due importance. Allen describes this in terms of land. Regarding land, Native Indians see the mountain for what it is, they see the plains for what it is. Still, they don't expect one to be the other. Even in the female universe of Lagunas the male and female spheres of activity do not unite as in the unisex mainstream where they look for quality. This has helped Allen in looking at the balance of genders where there is a need for each other. Talking on the balance of genders Allen says:

I think that we live in separate spheres. We have different consciousness, because we have different bodies. We need each other; but only if we recognize the validity of our own way, and therefore the validity of the other person's way, are we ever going to be able to actually function together. (Eysturoy 19)

This attitude teaches them to be more accommodating. Allen is unable to comprehend what mainstream women are fighting for. Laguna culture helps her to enjoy several privileges which mainstream patriarchy does not. According to her one should learn to

accept one's gender and transcend its limiting boundaries. One must learn to respect differences. When one abides by the norms of one's gender the true self emerges. In an interview Allen says:

You know, if you look at the plain we are on, you see the Sandias, which I have always thought of as male, and across, way across, is Mt. Taylor, whom I always have thought of as female. She stays there, and he stays here and they converse. They don't get mixed up in thinking that one has to be the other one, and they don't think they have to merge. (Eysturoy 19)

They do not see the need to merge because there is mutual respect between genders in the case of the Lagunas. But in mainstream society, patriarchy is the order of the day. First World women are frustrated because they suffer discrimination based on their sex and their needs are negated. They clamour for equality and to walk at par with men. What Allen says is that one cannot ask the mountain to be the river or vice versa. So humans should learn to accept the opposite sex knowing its limitations. Speaking to Annie Eysturoy, Allen says: "You know patriarchy, is about monogamy, it is about monotony, it is about monotheism, it is about unity, and it is about uniformity. No Indian system is like that, in any sense. They never wanted other people to be like them" (19) because they respected differences. Their integrity taught them tolerance without their identity.

Kingston depicts through crossing gender roles that women can assert their worth. Kingston rewrites and reconstructs myths in new ways. She relies on Chinese myths to explicate gender justice. And without gender justice there is no peace. The legend of Fa

Mook Lan, continued in *The Fifth Book of Peace*, describes how she returned from war, leading her army home. Kingston describes:

Fa Mook Lan leads her army home from war. She shows the troops herself changing back from a man to a woman, and gives them a vision of the Feminine. It is possible for a soldier to become Feminine. (390)

War has not brutalized Fa Mook Lan. Her peaceful, tolerant outlook shows she has suffered as a sign of great maturity and a problem solving strategy to promote world peace. So a Chinese myth is used to communicate a universal need. Thus, Kingston moves from a belligerent, warlike attitude to a plateau of peace. This is a kind of liberal feminism where society generally believes women are less capable. They fulfil the traditional roles resisting mainstream's war-like spirit of conquest. Community ethnic values have made her feel for suffering masses, and American exposure has liberated her to air her views. Most Chinese women value peace and are not war-like. Kingston writes to convert and not to entertain alone. Literature for ethnic women identities is intellectual conversion, emphasizing the aspect of enlightenment.

To possess a man-woman mind is of great use. Coleridge reiterates this idea remarking that, "a great mind must be androgynous" (Ruthven 105). In *The Woman Warrior*, Fa Mu Lan is disguised as a male, and tracks down the baron. She nurses the secret satisfaction of being more than a man. The baron is accused of using women to satisfy his lust. But in an encounter the baron tries to appeal to her male understanding thinking she is a man. She reflects the patriarchal bias to Chinese culture in the baron's attempt at male bonding. He reiterates society's poor opinion of women saying:

Oh come now. Everyone takes the girls when he can. The families are glad to be rid off them. 'Girls are maggots in the rice'. 'It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters' He quoted to me the sayings I hated.

(*Woman Warrior* 43)

As a response to this she rips off her shirt and reveals, "'You've done this,' I said, and ripped off my shirt to show him my back. 'You are responsible for this.' When I saw his startled eyes at my breasts, I slashed him across the face and on the second stroke cut off his head" (*Woman Warrior* 44). She wished him to know a woman was attacking him, since he had a poor opinion of women. Besides, the baron's deeds coerced her family to send her disguised as an emissary of revenge. When a man wants a woman she senses his weakness as her strength. Silently planning Fa Mu Lan strikes him taking her revenge and asserting her power. Kingston uses the woman warrior myth to reveal a woman with warrior like qualities and also as an archetype possessing rare skills of transcending gender roles. In *The Fifth Book of Peace* Kingston reconstructs the woman warrior myth. She advocates peace after returning from war. Fa Mu Lan reveals her feminine identity to the soldiers she leads. So taking her out of her disguise Kingston gives women credit for all Fa Mu Lan did "to show the soldiers that a woman is capable of everything" (Skenazy 132). She also establishes her bicultural identity, falling on the Chinese myth and communicating it in American idiom. Kingston learns the lesson that if a woman has to succeed she has to play male and female roles.

Allen a Laguna (tribe)-Scott-Lebanese, lesbian, Native American, falls back on her woman-centred culture. She is primarily concerned with preserving Native American crafts like weaving, and pot making – mostly feminine and racial occupations. Through

these trades women speak in feminine expressions. The warp and weft are the racial and gender threads being woven together which coexist but stand out. These womanly tasks indicate a survival, aesthetics, bonding, creativity and heritage. From a society where there were specific gender roles, there is a shift and change. Weaving and pot making were at one time masculine roles that were shifted to be feminine roles. The poem “Woman Work” illustrates Laguna Indian women’s life and work:

some make potteries
 some weave and spin
 remember
 the Woman/celebrate
 webs and making. (*Shadow* 112)

Allen’s poem “Grandmother” celebrates the traditional arts of Laguna pueblo communities, which is weaving. Grandmother spider is the archetypal progenitor for weavers who were traditionally male. Jaskoski has a perceptive comment to make:

The poem refers throughout to traditional Pueblo practices and in particular to the division of labour that assigned weaving and story telling to men and the construction of houses to women. The speaker of “Grandmother” maintains that both men and women weave, which is contrary to Pueblo custom; the speaker also equates weaving with storytelling, another activity assigned to men. (248)

Since construction of houses was by women the pueblo houses and fields belonged to women. Very cleverly Allen expresses how a task that men performed also has

undergone a change. Allen says she reweaves the tear, which is the erasure of women from creative activities of weaving and storytelling:

After her,
 the women and the men weave blankets into tales of life,
 memories of light and ladders,
 infinity-eyes, and rain.
 After her I sit on my laddered rain-bearing rug
 and mend the tear with string. (*Coyote's* 50)

Allen describes an androgynous speaker mending a rug that was created by her grandmother. And Allen continues this task which is handed down to her by her community. Allen asserts change, continuity, evolution, growth and preservation. But changes have occurred with the passage of time to even gender roles. Initially, it was only men who wove. Allen shows how as a slow evolution women and men also change their roles in community. Jaskoski observes: "Men have become house builders; women now participate in weaving and story telling" (248).

The woven blanket itself is a figure of androgyny since women and men change their roles, forming the warp and the weft which is interlocked, and neither predominates. In the poem the protagonist is reweaving a gap of the tear. Being bicultural Allen tries to mend the tear of a lost tradition. Though she fights against the mainstream she requires English to express Indian culture. She is aware of the gap in translating a culture and the thought process involved, and is trying to mend that tear also.

Generally craft is regarded as inferior to art. And what one notices is that Native Indians are considered great craftsmen but not connoisseurs of art. Native Indian culture

has not been able to bask in the limelight to have its art and craft focused on thanks to the negative efforts of the mainstream. Allen shares the views of Eduardo Galeano whom she quotes in her Introduction to *Spider Woman's Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing from Native American Women*:

Throughout America, from north to south, the dominant culture acknowledges Indians as objects of study, but denies them as subjects of history. The Indians have folklore, not culture; they practice superstitions, not religions; they speak dialects, not languages; they make crafts not art.

(1)

Kingston comes from a typical ethnic background where knot-making, and weaving are mainly feminine occupations. In *The Woman Warrior* Kingston describes a passage of the knot makers of ancient China. Some of the knot makers were excellent, their work, so intricate that the knot-makers went blind as a result. Kingston's narrative techniques are compared to the intricate knots of creativity.

Kingston sees the art of writing as comparable to the art of weaving since weaving is very much a part of Chinese life. This metaphorical perception of writing is quite understandable especially from a feminine point of view. She even attributes the occupation of weaving to one of her characters. This earthiness of her comprehension of social reality speaks a lot about her authenticity as a writer with a feminine touch.

Kingston's Fa Mu Lan is a weaver. The woman warrior also does her share of woman's work. Incidentally the word "text" and "texture" came from the same word weaving. It is only in *The Fifth Book of Peace* that she mentions Fa Mu Lan as a weaver. Kingston says in her interview to Paul Skenazy:

To make a woman character a weaver is so wonderful because that is a woman's art, something that women have done through thousands of years, in all cultures. It's important to know that the Woman Warrior did women's work; she wasn't just a military hero. (Skenazy 131)

Weaving and knitting are archetypes in European literature too. And Kingston comes from a culture where one of the major feminine occupations is weaving. Through this women express themselves. Even the character Fa Mu Lan is basically a weaver. In the myth she is portrayed as a battle-axe-type of woman. But she is actually an artist, a weaver. The warp and the weft are the racial and gender threads being woven together. Kingston has deeply integrated her experience into wisdom. In the chant of Fa Mu Lan Kingston leaves out this fact in *The Woman Warrior* but includes it in *The Fifth Book of Peace* to indicate that Fa Mu Lan is not brutalized by war and that like Penelope and Spider Woman she weaves and quilts like Kingston her text. This is how Kingston gives vent to the dilemma of being ethnic and woman.

Giovanni's ethnic background finds a feminine expression in quilting. Virginia C. Fowler in her Introduction says:

[...] the quilt represents the Black woman's creation of beauty out of discarded, worthless bits of material. Even more however the history evoked by the quilt and the love and human connection found in that history is what distinguish the quilt from "art". (*Collected Poetry* xxiv)

Giovanni's strategy in "Stardate Number 18628.190" a poem written for the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of *Essence* magazine, celebrates the Black woman. The contributions of Black women are like "a summer quilt" (*Collected Poetry* 358). This quilt stands for

family history and family love. The pieces of the quilt are scraps of cloth which reminds the speaker of events, and persons. This will not hang from walls but “This is here to keep me warm” (*Collected Poetry* 358). Besides being creative and making something useful there is an emotional attachment to the quilt. It also indicates, as Giovanni says, preservation of culture and continuity. In the poem “On My Journey now” Giovanni says:

There is this special feeling you get
 when you snuggle under a quilt
 that was made by your great-grandmother,
 washed and cared for by your mother
 passed on to you soft clean sweet smelling from the days before [. . .]

(*Blues* 90)

On looking at the history of art and craft one notices that craft is always frowned down on and considered as menial. Art is looked up to. Here the reference to different crafts is significant because it is gender based and done by the subalterns. So they are racial and gender based tasks which reveal women’s creativity, heritage, healing and bonding. These are metaphors of creativity and signs of deep suffering which reflect the hybrid experiences.

Concepts of Native Indian cultures and non native cultures are dissimilar. The modern white lesbian may see herself as distinct from “society”. But in Native societies though among lesbian women sex occurred regularly they also married and had children. If there were no children they even adopted. It is observed that lesbianism existed in Native American societies because of frequent absence of men from home for long periods of time – because of war and hunting. Allen says: “Young women were often

separated from the larger groups for periods of months or years, as were young men. In such circumstances, lesbianism and homosexuality were probably commonplace” (*Sacred Hoop* 256). Lesbianism is common and natural in Native American societies. “Lesbian writers find themselves oppressed therefore not only by the sexism of men but also by the ‘heterosexism’ of other women” (Ruthven 127). Allen in her short story “Deep Purple” explores Leela’s despair and sense of powerlessness. She is a Native lesbian cast ashore on the beach of the white lesbian’s world far from the sacred traditions of her people, because she loves a white woman, and because she is an urban Indian woman. Leela the protagonist tries to reclaim connection to All That is, to The Mystery, by means of politics and marijuana. Self-awareness and primordial feelings bring her to accept her plight as an Indian in a white culture. As Kay reads out in Allen’s short story “Deep Purple”:

It is essential that we as lesbian feminists oppose patriarchy in all of its forms. That includes calling our sisters to account when they employ patriarchal methods in business that cater only to women. (*Spider* 235)

Lesbians are antagonistic to heterosexual women who do not understand the plight of the lesbian and label them as perverts or add a stigma to their identity, confirming the fact that lesbianism is a part of ethnic feminism. Today there is talk of diverse sexualities as seen among Native Indians. But what is acceptable and accommodated in one society need not be acceptable in another.

According to Toril Moi women go through the three phases of “feminist”, “female” and “feminine”. Moi explains that the first is a political position, the second is a matter of biology and the third is a set of culturally defined characteristics (Moi 117). The

physical mutilation of women – foot binding – is practised by the Chinese as a way of preserving culture. Kingston describes in *The Woman Warrior* how young girls howled in pain as a part of foot binding at the age of seven: “Sisters used to sit on their beds and cry together, she said, as their mothers or their slaves removed the bandages for a few minutes each night”(9). As Ronald Takaki in *A Different Mirror: a History of Multicultural America* says:

In traditional China women of high status symbolized their subordination by binding their feet. This crippling practice began early in life and required women to wrap their feet tightly in order to keep them artificially small. The bones in the arch of the foot were intentionally broken so that the toes could be bent back under the foot, further decreasing the size of the foot. Bound feet were considered beautiful, but they also immobilized women and were intended to prevent them from wandering away from their domestic chores. (209-210)

Kingston artistically presents her antagonism to such practices by using her gynosophic stance as revealed in her works. Patriarchal traditions say that housework is for girls and women. This is said to reduce and confine female energy. Even cultural rituals reinforce the attempt to erase women through cultural rituals. Mary Daly in *Gyn /Ecology* says:

As we move further on the metapatriarchal journey, we find deeper and deeper layers of these demonic patterns embedded in the culture, implanted in our souls. These constitute mind bindings comparable to the foot bindings, which mutilated millions of Chinese women for a thousand

years. Stripping away layer after layer of these mind-binding societal/mental embeds is the a-mazing essential to the journey. (8)

Women learn to endeavour the pain of segregation living in an anti-female society where men do everything possible to check her from making her presence felt. The foot binding of the Chinese, the sati of the Indians, the African genital mutilation and the European witch hunting are indications of the male feeling of being threatened. But ethnic identities unveil the real motives of males to promote these rituals in any society as a universal demand by males for “mindbinding” women. Mary Daly says in

Gyn/Ecology:

To the degree that the Female Self has been possessed by the spirit of patriarchy, she has been slowly expiring. She has become dispirited, that is, depressed, downcast, lacking independent vigor and forcefulness. As she becomes dispossessed, enspirited, she moves out of range of the passive voices and begins to hear her own Active Voice, speaking her Self in successive acts of creation, cognitive, symbolic, psychic, physical spaces. She moves into these spaces and finds room to breathe, to breathe forth further space. (340)

An ordinary woman would want nothing more than to satisfy the body. But ethnic identities have been made conscious that they must struggle with bodily desires and not give in to them. Relying on their inner strength and creative powers they try to transcend rituals and assert their right to space as humans.

In every society woman is the producer and preserver of culture though she is the cultural outsider. A mother represents heterogeneous subjectivity and multiple identities.

She supports patriarchy and provides an emancipatory role too. Mothers take extra care in the upbringing of their children. Brave Orchid tries to induce some sense into her family members especially her daughters. So through stories, references and cautions the daughter is prepared for life consciously and unconsciously. Kingston says in *The Woman Warrior*: “Before we can leave our parents, they stuff our heads like the suitcases which they jam-pack with home made underwear” (87). The stories narrated inspire and preserve cultural values, and also warn the narrator and listener of the need to conform.

Kingston’s No Name Aunt is a character in *The Woman Warrior* who is treated as an outcaste for satiating her bodily desires. “The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them” (*Woman Warrior* 13) “wrongdoers eat alone” (*Woman Warrior* 7). But according to Kingston she alone is not to blame. Her marriage was conducted with a substitute, “When the family found a young man in the next village to be her husband, she had stood tractably beside the best rooster, his proxy, and promised before they met that she would be his forever” (*Woman Warrior* 7). Kingston goes on to say “The night she first saw him, he had sex with her. Then he left for America” (*Woman Warrior* 7). Lonely and frustrated she got to know the other man in a field, or he sold cloth to her or she had to have some dealings with him. He was not a stranger for “All the village were kinsmen,” (*Woman Warrior* 11). “The other man was not, after all, much different from her husband. They both gave orders; she followed. ‘If you tell your family, I’ll beat you. I’ll kill you. Be here again next week’ (*Woman Warrior* 7). When she tells him she is pregnant he organizes the raid against her. Yet he is not blamed, and escapes. To warn and to make her daughter conform, Brave Orchid advocates a patriarchal truth.

Kingston violates the traditional law by writing and preserving culture. A woman listening to herself being belittled as a young girl can do nothing much but salvage her wounded ego upon reaching adulthood. When Kingston immerses herself in another's experience it leads to self-knowledge. She writes vicariously for all women. She carefully "navigates herself through the perilous landscape of Chinese-America girlhood" (Wong 28). Kingston is a mouth-piece for her people. In a way Kingston through her own "talk stories" preserves Chinese culture but identifies herself not just as Chinese but as Chinese-American.

Statements like "it is better to bring up geese than girls", "Girls are like maggots", "To be a woman, to have a daughter in starvation time was waste enough" (*Woman Warrior* 6), "Feeding girls is feeding cow birds" (*Woman Warrior* 46) point to the fact that in Chinese society girls are of no use or have no calibre. But Kingston reconciles the two cultures because she is a hybrid from which stems new articulations. Kingston moves away from the typical Chinese life, and makes new articulations as a hybrid combining both Chinese and American cultures.

Black community is patriarchal, and yet women play a major role in family life. Black men are militantly assertive, and Black women feel deeply for their families so they are trapped by a sense of responsibility for their families. Giovanni says in "Sacred Cows . . . and Other Edibles": "If there was a benefit of slavery to the slaves it was that it broke down gender barriers; men and women shared the work, learned the songs, began and ended the day together" (*Prosaic* 247). One notices that even though Black men desert homes and responsibilities Black women never shirk their families. As Giovanni says in "Woman":

she decided to become
 a woman
 and though he still refused
 to be a man
 she decided it was all
 right [. . .] (*Cotton* 71)

Women as well as men share responsibilities in the mainstream culture, at least that is what White feminism is all about. But ethnic women are deprived of pursuing their interests like education, financial independence and their careers because of their responsibilities. But in contrast to Chinese women Black women are not helpless, inhibited or confined to the four walls of home. Black women have a space in patriarchy from where they operate playing different roles and often running homes alone.

Kingston rebels against the limitations of Chinese society, patriarchy, and community. She is wedged between social mores of community and the mainstream. The psychological conflict raging within her found its way out in being physically sick. In traditional Chinese society, women were expected to behave silently with submission but act heroically with strength. Brave Orchid did not wish to join her husband in America, leaving China. She tells Kingston: “I shouldn’t have left, but your father couldn’t have supported you without me. I’m the one with the big muscles” (*Woman Warrior* 104). They were both sub-women and super women. Her mother repeatedly reminds her of her role as a Chinese woman. “She said I would grow up a wife, and a slave but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman” (*Woman Warrior* 20).

Kingston's mother Brave Orchid is also like Fa Mu Lan. She uses the money her husband sends her while he is in America to get medical training. She works hard and several years later joins him in New York. She refuses to learn English because she wants to keep her Chinese culture intact without adulteration. It is on her request that her sister comes to America to win back her husband who is married to a "ghost" woman. But Brave Orchid is wrong in her assumptions. She is not aware of her wrong, alien vision of American society.

These writers are mouthpieces of their culture; and by writing reshape female history, myths and personal and collective identity. *The Woman Warrior* displaces the notion of exerting power over women as opposed to the orthodox Chinese and Christian concept. American individualism has been a source of strength for ethnic women venturing out of their homes in search of work and other activities. As Kingston says it is the western mind that "taught us how to doubt" (Skenazy 150). So the ethnics use this doubting and questioning spirit to decolonise and to make a space for themselves.

Beauvoir goes on to say:

Perhaps the myth of the woman will some day be extinguished; the more women assert themselves as human beings, the more the marvelous quality of the Other will die out in them. But today it still exists in the heart of every man. (142)

Americans are viewed as killers of Indians and yet American Indian writers are found trying to preserve culture. One finds in their works a discourse between the invisible worlds: their cultural past and the solid America. Allen says in the poem

"Taking a Visitor to See the Ruins":

I'd like you to meet the old Indian ruins

I promised.

My mother, Mrs. Francis, and my grandmother, Mrs. Gottlieb.

[.....]

the two who still live pueblo style in high-security dwellings

way up there where the enemy can't reach them

just like in the olden times. (*Life is a Fatal Disease* 36)

Allen resists mainstream American patriarchy's sexist and racist ways. She speaks for Pan Indian culture which is superior to the mainstream. Women are fore-grounded so women do not have to fight inequalities or injustices. She wants to preserve her Laguna culture because it is this life system that women of mainstream patriarchy are trying to achieve. Having experienced the injustices of the mainstream she wishes to form a society based on Laguna lines, which is beyond the dream of the white mainstream women.

Matrilineal descent makes Allen a Laguna. Besides American racism and patriarchy also make Allen opt for her Laguna culture. Allen has a better subject position in her Indian tribal society. Since mainstream American ways are ethnocentric Allen fights injustices of all kinds. She gives examples from her own life. Allen's grandmother Meta Atseye first marries a Scot (Kenneth Gunn) later re-marries a Jew. Allen remembers the injustices experienced by her grandmother. Allen says:

My Native American grandmother, Agnes Gunn, remembers being excluded from the group at Indian School in Albuquerque, from the group

at home in New Laguna: ‘They used to tell me to go away. They wouldn’t have anything to do with me. So, I did’. (*Off the Reservation* 208)

Allen’s grandmother went away to Cubero after marrying a German Jew. Allen’s mother lived in Cubero with her mother and Jewish stepfather. Allen remembers her mother saying: “They used to chase me down the hill, she remembers, throwing rocks at me, shouting ‘Judea! India!’ as they chased me” (*Off the Reservation* 208-209). The racism she experienced made her orient her daughter Paula Gunn Allen to preserve and assert the Indian side to her. What makes Allen Indian is her matrilineal descent and her turn of mind. Lagunas are non-materialistic and follow a “Mother-right culture” (*Off the Reservation* 79) where women are fore-grounded. The presence of women is important for all rituals. She calls American culture as “The death culture” (*Life is a Fatal Disease* 151) and Americanised Indians as “The dying generation”.

The phrase “Third World woman” is used as representing the unprivileged, backward, and powerless women of the world scattered in many societies including ethnic groups. Derrida’s idea of binary oppositions leads to Helene Cixous’s view of feminism as binary opposition regarding the First World and the Third World. Cixous says: “thought always worked through oppositions” (Eagleton 146). Anyway one needs one to define the other, so one can not call it derivative. There are unique features in the Third World ethnic values and its feminist values.

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* says that women are caught up in a social syntax in which they are never the subject but always the other. She says:

No one is more arrogant towards women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility. Those who are not fear-

ridden in the presence of their fellowmen are much more disposed to recognize a fellow creature in woman; (xxv)

The possible reactions to injustices are both protest and accommodation. In her Interview to Franchot Ballinger and Brian Swann Allen says:

I mean I've been beat up so many times, the heck with it. I keep going back out there, and attempting to convey to white women and more recently, to other women of color, what it is they're doing. Because (sic) they're not aware of what they're doing. I'm sure they don't mean to, but they do it! And so the bonding is poor [. . .] I've spent an awful lot of time just weeping and sobbing – because I'm not getting through to the people that I expect to be able to get through to. But I'm getting through too, so there's good times. (12)

Native American writers are not able to get themselves completely understood by the mainstream. This is not because white American mainstream do not understand, it is only because they do not wish to understand. Still Native-Indians most vociferously write and communicate through their works the injustice meted out to them. Feminists' talks of equality are only talks of restoring equality for white women with their white men. Nothing is being done to improve the lot of ethnic women vis-à-vis white mainstream women. Allen wants her folks to write and retaliate in the hope of conscientizing the mainstream. The lot of writers of tribal minorities remains the same unless they do something about it. Having experienced a superior tribal culture that respects genders she wishes to unmask the atrocities of the mainstream.

Because of their self-accepted subordinate position ethnic women have a greater experience of caring and nursing and compromising though they are not the recipients of any of these. They are more sensitive to issues of pain and suffering. Their religious and cultural teachings and practical common sense help them to get on in life. Their sense of perseverance enkindles in them an inner strength. The effort of ethnic identities is to fly from domestic confines in quest of their own space. They wish to move from their traditional ethnic women space, confronting a double-pronged attack; to a space where they can assert and be more articulate. Giovanni questions the double standards of the mainstream. She says:

When he forces his penis into a white woman, she produces a white child.

When he forces his penis into a Black woman, she produces a slave. How could one organ be responsible for two different entities? One human to be cared for and nurtured; one a product, much like wheat or corn or cotton, to be cut down to size and sold [. . .] Why won't his penis be consistent?

(Prosaic 538)

Having experienced marginalization, like feminists, they fight for freedom and justice. So, ethnic women are allies because they contribute to the feminist movement. From the paradigm of the colonized they decolonize themselves by creating a niche for themselves, and voice the experience of women undergoing dualities of gender and race.

Ethnic minorities have raised their voices against the mainstream ethnocentrism. Native Indians are a help and of service to the mainstream yet the mainstream does not have any intention of helping Native Indians or regarding them as equals. Allen says:

The fact is that neither women, Native Americans, or the Feminine have any place in the social order of the patriarchal West other than as objects, robotic as they might be, who will serve the father's interests, cater to his whims, endure his caprices with smiling amiability, and accept his rages, blows, and outrages with the sort of stoic, warm, loving equanimity he attributes to those women he has designated "saints".

As women, as Native people, we must now recognize that we are now and forever outside the patriarchal social contract; we are perceived as superfluous to the workings of Civilization, civilization being a code-word for patriarchy. (*Off the Reservation* 77-78)

Even though there is a global sisterly feeling, Allen knows that the Western woman will not speak for the ethnic woman identities, nor does she really understand their predicament even if she tries. Spivak says:

The space from which we speak is always on the move, criss-crossed by the conflicting and shifting discourses of things like our social class, education, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. It is very difficult to assume that the critic can ever speak on behalf of anybody, because the position of both the critic and their "object" is never securely fixed.

(qtd. in McLeod 186-87)

Besides, out of a feeling of sisterhood white mainstream women would notionally empathize with Native Indian women and help them in improving their lot. Yet much to their chagrin Native Indians realize they will never be regarded as equals.

On account of colonization ethnic identities have a double vision of subservience and domination. Allen says colonization is a kind of “soul theft, heart theft and mind theft” (*Spider* 229), which ends up in servility. But as an offshoot it also results in resistance and assertion of identity. Allen’s enviable position in Laguna culture makes her assert her Indian identity and denounce mainstream patriarchy. The hold that her culture has on detribalized women like Ephanie is reflected by awakening the dormant yet unasserted values in her. In the novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* Ephanie, the alter ego of Allen, remembers being told:

Stand up for your rights, they had told her, she had told herself, someone was always telling someone. Sometimes she did. Stand up. Stand out. But that was frightening. Her mother had insisted on it. Saying, ‘Stand up to them’ [. . .] Sometimes she stood up. Surely she did other times she just dissolved. Trying to become one with the shadows. With (sic) the silences, with the dark. (12)

Ephanie experiences this struggle between domination of the mainstream and assertion of Native culture in a quest for identity. Asserting her Indian identity has been difficult for Allen who is a detribalized Native American. Being ostracized from it she experiences brokenness. But brought up in patriarchal mainstream, by a Laguna mother and grandmother, causes a split in her subjectivity.

In Kingston’s case subservience or conforming is to Chinese patriarchal norms and mainstream racism. Yet American individualism liberates and helps her to assert. Exposure to mainstream patriarchy (education, individualism, white feminism) has assisted her in gaining confidence to fight against the crippling Chinese orthodoxy.

Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen have gained a sizeable audience for their intrinsic worth and their racial identity. All ethnic identities go through frustrating period of cultural syncretism, and finally towards a separate reality.

It is American racism that makes Black Americans feel inferior. Giovanni tries to awaken Afro-American consciousness which can kill the inferiority complex in Blacks, and make them assertive. Giovanni says that the Black American community is conscious of their slave ancestors, so this secondary feeling plagues them. She quotes from “Linkage” where a Black slave girl is being sold, “if you are a little Black girl . . . standing on a stage . . . waiting to be purchased . . . Is their kindness . . . concern . . . compassion . . . in the faces examining you . . .” (*Those who ride the Night winds* 25). To be examined as a slave is a feeling the mainstream White woman will not understand. So the experiences of the Third World women are very different from the First World women.

Levertov does not experience marginalisation to the extent that Kingston, Giovanni and Allen experience it. But she is aware of ethnocentrism and marginalisation shown to others. It is this white colour of the mainstream that makes minorities feel that the mainstream is superior to the marginalized. Yet the anti-Semitic feelings globally expressed have made them label her a Black (non-white) minority. Levertov senses America’s racist ways only after the Vietnam War. Levertov opines in “The Long Way Round”:

what it is to awaken
each day Black in White America,
each day struggling

to affirm

a who-I-am my white skin never [. . .] (*Life in the Forest* 53)

Even Levertov who has Eurocentric ties (Welsh) is looked down on by the mainstream. But when compared to the other minorities her situation is better. The superiority complex of the mainstream makes them build imaginary walls to distance the inferior groups. Whoever is unlike the mainstream is considered inferior and minoritised. And the mainstream is not grateful for the contributions of those minoritised.

Levertov's sensitivity is observed since without experiencing sexism or racism to the same degree as the other three writers she is aware of these injustices around her. Experiencing alienation is the greatest pain. And living in America as a conscientious writer she hopes for social reform, being sensitive to other peoples' pain. She exposes mainstream atrocities to the earth, injustices against races and sexist ways of patriarchy. Her mature, balanced and concise view of the world and issues has helped in bringing to light an alternative perspective.

Very often it is Black women who instigate Black men to work for a revolution. Giovanni's early collection of poems reveal her anger and enthusiasm, in often, rhythmic tones. In her first two volumes *Black Feeling / Black Talk* (1968), *Black Judgement* (1968) she calls Afro-Americans to destroy both the whites who oppress them and the passive Blacks who remain indifferent. In "Nikki Rosa" from *Black Judgement* she advocates that happiness comes from love and not material possessions. In her poem "Of Liberation" she speaks of Black men being sent out to kill other people:

Mistakes are a fact of life

It is the response to error that counts

Erase our errors with the Black Flame

[.....]

Our choice now is war or death

Our option is survival

Listen to your own Black hearts [. . .] (*Collected Poetry* 44)

In the last poem “My House” in the collection by the same name, Giovanni speaks of a compromise where she will live with her man suiting his needs but at the same time, fulfilling her own wishes as she says:

i only want to

be there to kiss you

[.....]

where i want to kiss you

cause it is my house

and i plan to live in it [. . .] (67)

The house stands for a world, a reality in which she wishes to carry out her will. Her world is the kitchen, food, love and revolution. Giovanni is trained emotionally to love, intellectually and spiritually to be in power.

The young Nikki let Black history linger in her subconscious and grew up a radical and a revolutionary. With age she mellows but her texts reflect her pride in her Blackness, and the dependency of white women on black women. She reveals the plight of the Black women who feel cheated when their male counterparts are fooled by White women’s beauty. She describes the ill treatment women suffer when Black women are

belittled not just by White men but also by White women. That is why she says the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line.

The white / non-white binaries have been felt strongly by Nikki Giovanni. The colour of the skin has nothing to do with their worth. Yet “blackness” has been looked upon as some kind of sin by the mainstream. They never look beyond the skin, hardly thinking that a human soul lurks there. In the poem “Categories” Giovanni questions white / black divisions:

the ugly awful loneliness of being
locked into a mind and body that belong
to a *name or non-name*--not that it matters
cause *you* feel and *it* felt but you have [. . .] (*My House* 29)

Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen as writers of ethnic identity have realized their calibre, are trying to work out new concepts and trying to set themselves afoot as new women. For community girls are burdens, and as per racist views ethnic women are easy targets. None of these writers of ethnic identity are wedded to tradition only; they are western too. Hence these writers evolve their new identity. Giovanni tells Arlene Elder:

I think that birth largely has to be considered an accident; I don't know another way around it. It's just a way of identifying. If it's not going to be positive, then its pointless, because nobody chose the circumstances under which they were born, nor the place, nor the parents to whom they were born, not their gender, nor any of that. So if it's not going to be a positive identification, then you really should let it go. (“Interview” 67)

It is not as per an individual's wish that he said, "well I think I'll be a boy or I think I'll be a girl" (Giovanni, "Interview" 68). From this it is clear that human beings hardly have a choice in deciding their sex, or race, yet people do not have the common sense not to blame anyone for the circumstances of their existence. So one should not punish or reward people for their ethnicity or gender, especially since they have no control over it. This shows her balanced and mature outlook. Giovanni says: "I don't have a quarrel with history, otherwise you'd spend all of your time debating whether or not your mother should have had you" ("Interview" 68). Yet this dilemma of their gender and race is a characteristic suffering of ethnic women the world over.

Turning a deaf ear to male expectations, Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen, forge ahead, and articulate new relationships for the voiceless as they experience and see the same. American influences make them bold to speak of the relentless silencing of women. As per neo feminism women have to be restored from their marginalised position (not displacing men but sharing it with them). For this they deconstruct the male/female binary opposition of white feminism, and construct new concepts of identity.

Power always implies binary structures, of power and powerlessness. A woman is powerless according to patriarchal norms. And unless she realizes that she has to do something to make herself powerful, no one else will help her. Giovanni says that women do household chores and forget or give up their own interests. She says: "Do we allow them their elsewhere (sic) . . . to parade their talents . . . Do we pretend that all is well" (*Those who ride the Night Winds* 27). These words reverberate in most minds to establish it as true, because seldom is it found that women are encouraged or given the power to pursue their interests. Giovanni goes on to say, "I've been taught all my life that power is

an absolute good not because I'm objectively more fit to wield power but because subjectively if I don't wield it it (sic) will be wielded over me" (*Prosaic* 44). By wielding the new power these writers are themselves asserting. Chandra Talpade Mohanty says:

Women are powerless, unified groups. If the struggle for a just society is seen in terms of the move from powerlessness to power for women as a group, and this is the implication in feminists discourse that structures sexual difference in terms of the divisions between the sexes, then the new society would be structurally identical to the existing organization of power relations, constituting itself as a simple inversion of what exists. If relations of domination and exploitation are defined in terms of binary divisions – groups that dominate and groups that are dominated – then surely the implication is that the accession to power of women as a group is sufficient to dismantle the existing organization of relations.

(Mohanty 39)

These writers explicitly critique and reconstruct the power-knowledge nexus of feminist cross-cultural scholarship to be attentive to the micro-politics of context, subjectivity and struggle. This is an attempt to map how the struggle of ethnic women, in the background of Anglo American feminism, has been able to raise its head, and articulate new relationships as they determine and perceive them to be. Thus, this study is an intervention in feminist space for the ethnicity of the marginalized immigrants who find themselves being erased or misrepresented.

CHAPTER V

DISLOCATING LANGUAGE INTO NEW RELATIONSHIPS

Language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture, paints of pictures, or sounds of music. But one should realize that language is not mere inert matter like stone but is itself a creation of men and is thus charged with the cultural heritage of a linguistic group.

–Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*

This chapter is an attempt to capture and analyse the linguistic devices as employed by Kingston, Giovanni, Levertov and Allen generated from their experiential knowledge of life. It is the limitations imposed by community and the mainstream that make them take a third space of counter discourse. Readers can tease out fundamental oppositions to the mainstream and community from the narrative styles of these hybrid identities. Being bicultural they set new standards for self-reflexivity. They find the existing linguistic modes to be inadequate and sometimes even futile. So they are artistically constrained and challenged to go in for new items of vocabulary, phraseology and totally new styles of construction all for the purpose of dislocating language into their own meaning. Some of these experiments deserve to be examined, scrutinized and evaluated. They are motivated by a search for literary skills to correspond to their own experience of both community and the mainstream. It is a self-imposed literary programme and they create cultural roles for themselves.

The language of ethnic identities is a sign of rift between two generations. To the first generation the American “ghosts” and their language and ways are unacceptable and are corrosive of family solidarity. Resisting changes the first generation leans closer to their mother tongue which shields them from Americanization. Upon receiving formal

education the writers with ethnic background take naturally to English. It is not their own free choice but circumstances are such that English linguistically colonizes them. Later they overcome this linguistic colonization by resisting and writing creatively, and begin linguistically decolonising. So the English language is instrumental in voicing the unvoiced and is an essential part of creative self-expression. These writers overcome their double bind by overcoming their linguistic servility to the mainstream language. They manipulate English to their advantage with new styles, vocabulary and special idiosyncratic expressions. This is how they start dislocating language into their meanings. Giovanni writes sometimes in free verse but always creatively in a new style of writing using ellipsis, to indicate line breaks and changing the combination of words and spellings as seen in the poem “I Wrote a Good Omelet”:

I wrote a good omelet . . . and ate a hot poem . . .
 after loving you
 Buttoned my car . . . and drove my coat home . . . in the
 rain . . .
 after loving you
 I goed on red . . . and stopped on green . . . floating [. . .]

(Collected Poetry 337)

This style of writing makes the poem catchy, when the word order and unique idiosyncratic expressive style are retained. Her simplistic, witty vocabulary and spelling have a distinction which is also an attention drawing device. Conventional grammar rules and meaning are deliberately forgotten. One observes Giovanni’s own persona matures to create well-crafted poems revealing her individualism. Eventhough there is a change of

mood in her poems, William J. Harris says of Giovanni that, “her poetry is always direct, conversational, and grounded in the rhythms of Black music and speech” (193).

Giovanni’s innovation of a new “lineless” poetic form is seen first in her collection *Those Who Ride the Night Winds*. It reflects her heightened self-knowledge and imagination. She writes in short paragraphs punctuated with ellipsis reminiscent of telegraphic communication. In the poem “Hands: For Mother’s Day” in the above collection, Giovanni says:

I think hands must be very important . . . Hands: plait hair
 . . . knead bread . . . spank bottoms . . . wring in anguish . . . shake
 the air in exasperation . . . wipe tears, sweat, and pain from faces [. . .] (16)

In this style word groups are separated from each other by ellipses rather than line breaks. This new form retains the rhythmic effects of an oral tradition and can deal with a wide subject matter. So in a way she is creating something new, but at the same time it is still “the American language”, pushed further. She, like the others, creates a new English with racial accents. Like them she tries to bring about a global culture. Fanon says: “The colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope” (*Wretched of the Earth* 187). She writes in the borrowed language of the colonized but leaves her cultural hallmark through certain techniques like – rhythm, phraseology and spellings. Giovanni develops this form to check the mainstream’s absolutism and complacency of discourse which they dominate.

As an indication to reveal that community is against Amercanisation Kingston blames her mother for cutting her frenum so that she is unable to speak. According to

Kingston's mother, Brave Orchid, this act of mutilation is not to make her unable to speak in English but her "tongue cut loose" (*Woman Warrior* 197) is to make her speak better. Brave Orchid says:

'I cut it so that you would not be tongue-tied. Your tongue would be able to move in any language. You'll be able to speak languages that are completely different from one another. You'll be able to pronounce anything'. (*Woman Warrior* 164)

Despite her laudable intentions, Kingston, far from becoming fluent is unable to speak in any language for a very long time because of her feelings of 'otherness' and alienation. Brave Orchid counters her daughter Kingston's verbal attack by saying that the latter feels stifled in Chinese culture only because she has misunderstood it and because of American influences. Kingston's is a cultural transition from a Chinese child to a Chinese American woman. Writers by communicating resist sinking into passive anonymity. Kingston, by writing about herself, resists hegemony. She retains the Chinese rhythms while writing in English.

The second generation to some extent is bilingual. But later generations, sometimes, understand their mother tongue and often replace it with English. These ethnic writers wield a kind of social bilingualism. Their life seems rent into two. The push-pull factor takes an upper hand in their psychology. In an interview Kingston tells Marilyn Chin:

[. . .] I was trying to find an American language that would translate the speech of the people who are living their lives with the Chinese language. They carry on their adventures and their emotional life and everything in

Chinese. I had to find a way to translate all that into a graceful American language. (qtd. in Skenazy100)

The English language has survived because it has been used, though it has undergone many changes. It is these innumerable users that have caused the changes since English is used differently by them. When ethnic identities write in English they write to preserve, to assert, to communicate and for survival. Writing in English in a way is limiting for writers of ethnic identity. Yet they stretch English further; and transcend these difficulties by enriching English with new myths, vocabulary, narrative techniques and styles to avoid stereotyping. By doing this they resist erasure and reflect the nuances of their indigeneous culture. They write to be heard and to correct wrong notions of community and themselves from the subject position. They contribute to the great fund of multicultural literature winning the linguistic battle by being recognized as writers. Giovanni says, "Literature is one of the tools white people have used for survival" (*Prosaic* 120). So, the ethnic has mastered the ghost language and as a result, "e" replaces "E" in Ethnic. A new English with racial accents has evolved.

One of the crucial features of ethnic women's writing is its mosaic or composite quality. They re-fashion English to accommodate their experiences. Being bicultural writers they contribute to the multicultural literature which today dominates the literature in English. Allen says:

'I think in some respects the whole world is a multicultural event, and it's possible, if it's possible for me to stay alive, then it's possible for the

whole world to stay alive. If I can communicate, then all the different people in the world can communicate with one another’.

(qtd. in Draper 1)

America encourages immigration hence it becomes naturally and easily multicultural. Laura Bush told CNN television, as reported by *The New Indian Express* dated 5 May 2006: “We are a nation of immigrants,” the First Lady continued, “We are a nation of many many languages, because immigrants come and bring their languages” (“Laura” 13). The statement is founded on an obvious historical reality, and therefore it is totally accepted. What is missed is the contribution made by the immigrant speakers of the language to the mainstream English.

The ethnic identities enrich English by learning it for survival. But the resultant multicultural writing has become a boon for them because readers are able to relate to various ethnic cultures. The reason why universal paradigms, like archetypes, get legitimized, and sound convincing, is because they are accepted as standard world communication. This standard international style includes the traditional Anglo-American mainstream. It is quite obvious that English language is taking new forms and styles owing to the ethnic idiom that these new writers bring through their communication in English. An example of an ethnic idiom used by Kingston is “big family” giving a sense of international belonging. “The Chinese idiom for ‘everybody’ is ‘big family’. ‘Have you taught the big family yet? You go teach the big family. Teach the nation family’” (Kingston, *Fifth Book* 241), Kingston’s mother asks her. This enrichment of the language has behind it a solidity of ethnic experience and the highly individualized way in which they approach the language.

Giovanni as a representative of Blacks reveals their colloquial usages – of phrases and words; unusual spellings, violation of grammar, words that refer to their hairstyles also enter the language. Often their writing also becomes speech like, a reminder of the Black oral tradition. Giovanni in the poem “Beautiful Black Men” says:

i wanta say just gotta say something
 bout those beautiful beautiful beautiful outasight
 black men
 with they afros. (*Collected Poetry* 70)

Giovanni uses a different idiom “outasight”, special syntax “they afros” and speech rhythms that are utterances that build up the excitement while reciting / reading. One observes the musical lilt to her poems.

Blacks have contributed greatly to music in the world. The blues music was brought to America by the slaves who sang while working on the plantations. This was also a means of communication. This music also reveals the mood of the singer or singers. The blues is a vocal and instrumental form of music based on the use of blue notes (notes sung on a lower pitch than those of the major scale for expressive purpose) and a repetitive pattern that typically follows a twelve bar structure. Jazz is said to have evolved from the blues. Giovanni uses the blues idiom to attack racism in American life and celebrate food. In poetry and prose too this music is incorporated in the form of words and rhythms. Giovanni says:

All music in the world is Black music (sic). Or was until it was imported
 and, like good dough in the hands of a bad cook, kneaded and bent until it
 was too tough for us to handle. The blues haven’t been reborn because

they have never died. [. . .] A people need to have something all to ourselves. The blues will be with us until we are free. (*Prosaic* 148-49)

Her poetry reflects not just the rhythms of Black music but the aspirations, frustrations and abject failures of the ethnic group. Black music is a silent code amidst Black people to communicate what they feel and think and White reactions to them. Giovanni's poems are musical and act as dance numbers. Her poems not only have a rhythm of the typical music contributed by Afro-Americans but a lot of poems seem to imbibe the spirit of jazz and blues. In "This Poem" she says: "This poem wants to sing . . . jazz me baby, I'm blue . . ." (*Blues* 69).

Giovanni is a musician, preacher and a cultural ambassador. Within her poems is intertwined music, ethnic idiom and Black arts. Susanne Juhasz observes the use of Black English in the poems of Giovanni. She says:

Making poems from Black English is more than using idioms and grammatical idiosyncrasies; the very form of Black English, and certainly its power, is derived from its tradition and pre-eminent usage as an oral language. So in Giovanni's poems both theme and structure rely on sound patterns for significance. (185)

For Kingston her liberating experience was attending American school from the age of six. She also attends Chinese language school for seven years. Though her initial inhibitions reveal how inarticulate she felt, eventually Kingston's education made her accept what is good in Chinese culture, and she fashions it in American language. Grateful to American education, Kingston remains loyal to America. She says, "[. . .] if they say write ten pages, I can write fifteen" (*Woman Warrior* 201). Kingston is proud of

mastering the master's language. From a diffident Chinese she becomes an assertive, hyphenated ghost woman. Even as she retains her Chinese identity she has with her a Chinese American consciousness. Paula Rabinowitz quotes Kingston in the *Michigan Quarterly*,

I am trying to write an American language that has Chinese accents; I will write the American language as I speak it. So, in a way, I was creating something new, but at the same time, it's still the American language, pushed further. (182)

Kingston goes on to say: "If I can use this language and literature in a really beautiful, strong way; then I have claimed all of it for us" (Rabinowitz 183). So English is being stretched forward in the hands of the ethnic writer. Kingston remarks: "I felt that I was building, creating, myself and these people as American people, to make everyone realize that these are American people. Even though they have strange Chinese memories they are American people. Also, I am creating part of American literature, and I was very aware of doing that, of adding to American literature" (Rabinowitz 182). Ethnic identities in America are American people who by writing are contributing to the fund of American literature.

It is generally accepted that ethnic identities have overcome the obstacles of racism and sexism which checked their articulations using English of the English man, and using it with ease as though it is not English but "english". Women find language as a medium to express the double bind – for expression and liberating oneself from interior colonisation. It is a tool or a weapon which reflects a certain angularity, deviating from male norms of language. Robin Lakoff in her 1973 essay on "Language and Woman's

Place” says that if a sentence, when uttered by a woman, is acceptable and when uttered by a man is unacceptable, then there must be “hierarchies of grammaticality” (qtd. in Ruthven 102). It is inside man-made language that there is a female-specific language. Woman’s language indicates not just femaleness but powerlessness. And women have more to gain politically from increasing their authority in discourses of power. So when they are adept in English they use it as a weapon for social reform. Kingston takes revenge, as it is the natural law of her community not in the manner of eye for an eye but conscientizing the Chinese, the mainstream and the world that she is a word warrior taking revenge. She takes revenge like the warrior woman Fa Mu Lan by writing. The instrument of revenge is the pen:

The idioms for *revenge* are ‘report a crime’ and ‘report to five families’.

The reporting is the vengeance – not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words – ‘chink’ words and ‘gook’ words too – that they do not fit on my skin. (*Woman Warrior* 52-53)

By writing, Kingston takes revenge on her community because she is not supposed to tell anyone anything. She represents the mainstream unlike what the mainstream has projected of itself. By writing Kingston also subverts the normal purpose of writing. Through her social duty and heroism and her role as deliverer she brings forth the injustices women suffer.

The inferiorization of women is a patriarchal or ethnocentric need. K. K. Ruthven says: “women are not inferior by Nature but inferiorised by culture” (45). But patriarchal taboos against self- revelation are so strong that it is only in a state of hysteria that women reveal their authentic self in a body language. Michel Pecheux says in *Language*

Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious that meanings are not neutral. It is the position of the speaker that determines the meanings of the words (111). The ethnic minority's culture is regarded as inferior to American culture. The position of Kingston is that of a hybrid. So words change in their meanings from one discourse to another. When these writers use words, their hyphenated existence must be remembered. The irreconcilable schism between ethnic culture and western thought within has pitted them with a will to write. So words will right their wrongs and life, and art will be avenged. As writers and re-tellers of ancient tales they transcend traditional roles, and become accepted and recognized.

Writing is an emancipatory practice that makes one feel empowered. The use of a common language is not necessarily an indication for uniformity of thoughts or feelings. The wide use of English has resulted in variant forms of English expressing indigeneous thoughts. Each ethnic identity who writes in English hails from a culturally unique group, and reflects the language and culture of that group. By writing in English they get wide readership, and this is also a step forward to de-link or decolonise the colonial hangover and to assert their ethnic identity through English for even the mainstream to see. It is observed that Kingston makes use of several words, maxims and phrases to stretch English further. For example in *The Woman Warrior*: – “The Chinese say a ready tongue is an evil” (164). Some examples of phrases and idioms used are ““Better to raise geese than girls”” (46) and “Girls are maggots in the rice” (43). Chinese is a language of homonyms. Words have similar spellings but different meanings. The older generation called the younger generation “Ho Chi Kuei” (204). This has several meanings. It means “good earth papers” (i.e. you have papers to prove you belong to this earth). It also means

“a good child ghost”. Some of the culture specific words like “kuei” means spirits that are malevolent. These words pose a great deal of problems in translation. “Kuei” means ghost in English. They call the Whites ‘ghosts’, white ghost, greengrocer ghost, and so on. And her parents call her a ghost because she doesn’t toe the line. By using indigeneous words English is pushed further. “A *soo hong* is a home where sojourners can stay for free” (*Fifth Book* 349). It is a house trailer. Kingston’s mother moves to a “soo hong” to accommodate her village cousins. Kingston dreams of being in her mother’s company making “gwoa joong chay” (*Fifth Book* 251). It is an elaborate preparation of beans and peas, egg, pork and special leaves. Often specific unavoidable vocabulary is introduced. Vocabulary of this kind is introduced so that the writer retains the nuance of the specific culture.

Allen also searches for apt words to communicate effectively Laguna thought patterns in English. For this she includes certain Native Indian Laguna words like “sipapu” which means underworld (*Off the Reservation* 1), “umane” which means power and “wakan” which means sacred. “Mesas” are the flat table top mountains, “arroyo” are the inland streams. “Kiva” is a separate room for women as she says in “The Blessing” – “faded kivas of our dreams” (*Life is a Fatal Disease* 193). “Bright bits of obsidian” is mentioned in “Recuerdo”. It is the hard, dark, glass-like rock formed from lava, which is used by Native Indian women to make pots (*Shadow* 106). Laguna women made pots and jewellery as mentioned in “Powwow 79, Durango” (*Life is a Fatal Disease* 90). “Powwow” means a meeting of people. Old “coyote” refers to an Indian but comes from a kind of animal in the dog family found in America. A Native Indian woman is called “squaw” and Allen describes herself as “heathen squaw” in “Molly Brant, Iroquois

Matron Speaks” (*Life is a Fatal Disease* 70). In the poem “Grandmother” Allen mentions a line “After her I sit on my laddered rain bearing rug” which requires a knowledge of Laguna homes (*Coyote’s* 50). Lagunas entered their homes through ladders from the top. This was to protect themselves from wild animals. Allen’s prolific use of native Indian words in her English poems is indicative of her ethnic self-assertion which brings a lot of self satisfaction to the poet in terms of linguistic fulfilment.

Giovanni asserts her difference by constructing her own word order which is opposed to the mainstream rules. She makes use of typical Black colloquial usage like in the poem “Beautiful black Men” in *ego-tripping* “i wanta say just gotta say something” (25). Risking intelligibility she persists in using the black phraseology to establish an ethnic identity. In yet another poem “Communication” she says “I’m gonna grab your love” (*Ego-tripping* 35). Yet another example is in “Make up” “dontcha know” (*Cotton* 79). In the “Kidnap poem” she describes how a poet would kidnap a person in words “if I were a poet / I’d kidnap you/put you in my phrases and meter” (*Ego-tripping* 1). It is observed that Giovanni fails to see the importance of punctuation. Jean Gould says: “Giovanni rarely uses punctuations or capitals” (338). Especially the word “i” is used in small letters for I. An example “i rock and talk and go to church most times / but aren’t you lonely sometimes i asked” (*My House* 11). She makes use of typical Afro-American vocabulary – gonna ,wanna, cha cha cha , whitie which are all colloquial expressions. Giovanni by flouting the rules of language, and even of punctuation, writes with a dissenting note.

Appropriating the English language is a way of turning America into yet another aspect of their own cultures. Thus inarticulate silences are voiced through English and

heard. The travails of immigrants have become a major theme of ethnic autobiographies. Immigrants express their sufferings, life experiences, cultural differences and personal emotions for therapeutic effect. They are bound to ventilate these in their works, especially in their early works by means of first person narratives. Kingston speaks about writing with two traditions in mind:

The Chinese “I” has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American “I,” assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight? Was it out of politeness that this writer left off strokes the way a Chinese has to write her own name small and crooked? No, it was not politeness. “I” is a capital and “you” is lower-case (sic).

(Woman Warrior 166-67)

There is a glaring graphic ambiguity between the “I” that is written and the self in the autobiography. “I” stands for American individualism and the Chinese “i” is self-effacing for Kingston. It is a girl’s struggle to reconcile the demands of two cultures. These autobiographies spring up because writers want to talk of the self in a hostile world. The autobiography is the “I” of American ideology (Melchior 281). According to Chinese practice when a woman tells a tale she must not use the first person. So Kingston’s narration is not in the first person. Instead there are many voices. Kingston faces the duality of the medium being alien and the experience ethnic. Elizabeth Fifer says: “In autobiography, the told story often is accompanied by the untold one” (314). But Kingston oscillates between narration by Brave Orchid, herself and the third person. Bonnie Melchior says: “Kingston deconstructs autobiography and the male American ideologies associated with it by problematizing its assumptions about the nature of the

self and the nature of fact. Reading her texts implies that I is not causal; it is a textual construct, open ended, that exists only paired with you” (282). When an ethnic identity writes an autobiography the dialectics between him and the mainstream is implied and felt. Ethnic identities change, and this leads to growth, and this is reflected in their works.

Kingston’s autobiographical novel reveals newness. It is not typical like that of the mainstream nor does she abandon the form completely, since “the cultural resonances so crucial to her disruption of hegemonic conceptions of Chinese-American identity, gender and history would be lost,” (Nishime 68) through a rewriting of the autobiographical form in fictional style. Since her work does not fall into the traditional pattern of autobiography, allegations are made that she is not realistic for want of first person experiences.

Psychological alienation and cultural deprivation lead to an outcome of great writing. Ethnic writing is creative like ethnic knot making. And complicated knots “blinded the knot-maker” (*Woman Warrior* 163). Kingston is an outlaw knot-maker who weaves incredibly intricate knots of fiction, history and myth. Speaking to Fishkin Kingston says:

I think that in every one of my books I had to create a new way of telling what I had to say. And I feel that I break through pigeonholes of what’s fiction and what’s nonfiction, of what an autobiography is. My next thought is trying to figure out a way to integrate fiction and nonfiction. So I think that I am constantly experimenting in new literary forms and they are very complicated. (qtd. in Skenazy 167)

Kingston's works are not just ethnic autobiographies, but also histories. She draws from the past to reshape the future – *China Men* is a good example.

Giovanni's works are also to a great extent autobiographical, and reflect her deep love for ancestry, the travails of her slave ancestors and pride in heritage. Poems like “Nikki-Rosa” and “Ego-tripping” are autobiographical – they reflect her past. “Nikki-Rosa” is her signature poem:

childhood remembrances are always a drag
if you're Black
you always remember things like living in Woodlawn
with no inside toilet [. . .] (*Black Judgement* 58)

From autobiographical exposition as seen in *Gemini* she moves on to being confessional since she believes in confiding in the readers. The poem “Ego-tripping” is very confessional and self explanatory:

I was born in the Congo
I walked the fertile crescent and built
the sphinx
I designed a pyramid so tough that a star [. . .] (*Ego-tripping* 3)

Ethnic writers, because they are caught between cultures use English to find their own unique voice. Giovanni prefers to express her Blackness through English thus changing it. In the poem “My House” she says:

english isn't a good language
to express emotion through
mostly i imagine because people

try to speak english instead

of trying to speak through it. (*Collected Poetry* 193)

Giovanni writes in English discussing her ethos because of long absence from the geographical space Africa. Virginia C. Fowler says in the Introduction: “Written language, the poem suggests, becomes a barrier to expression and understanding when we treat it as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end” (*Collected Poetry* xxii). If a language is to survive it is to be used. The text is integration and alienation felt by the writer. When an ethnic identity writes in English he/she is establishing a relationship with that culture yet he/she feels alienated for want of words irrelevant and unacceptable. A writer must rely on his memory, imagination and the storehouse of images, thus creating a space for himself.

On being interviewed Allen was asked having straddled so many cultures, what makes her an Indian. To this Allen replied:

I believe that it’s a turn of mind. I don’t speak Laguna, and I find myself in enormous trouble. Continually [. . .] There was no way to understand it. But it seems to me that what happens is that I think like a Laguna. But I have only English to talk in, and so I’m saying that it’s a consciousness style more than a cultural style. (Interview Ballinger 6)

Even while writing in English she maintains this Indian thought structure. For all practical purposes, Allen is a hybrid who identifies with the Native Americans. She expresses Laguna Sioux thought structure in American idiom to avoid cultural erasure. Thus she speaks and writes in the thought structure of Laguna Indians, which she learnt from her mother and grandmother. In her *MELUS* interview Allen says:

So I've got an internal check system that I think comes from listening to the intonations of my family when they were talking to one another, as well as when they addressed me. I think that's probably where that internal sense comes from. (Ballinger 8)

The English that the mainstream speaks is different from Allen's English. The difference is not in the words and grammar but in the thought structure being communicated. The English of writers of ethnic identities will always be influenced by their respective mother tongues. They know they are products of acculturation to some extent.

The writers of ethnic identity in course of the push and the pull of two languages become self-conscious of themselves and the two languages. They feel their individuality is at stake, writing in English. But, more than that, they are conscious of their limitations in English. They cannot translate several indigeneous thoughts and ideas into English. The essence and the sparkle are lost or the nuances of the language cannot be captured. Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen by their variances have enriched the English language through their presentations of oral traditions, story telling and myths.

Communication is always through verbal and non-verbal signals. It could be written or oral. Oral tradition is passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Gestures and facial expressions are also important for full signification. Omissions, additions and modifications are made. A lot of modified and modernized versions exist. Americanization has erased cultures but the oral tradition has retained certain traditions. Giovanni and Allen inherit the oral tradition whereas Levertov and Kingston inherit the "talk story" tradition which is slightly different. Kingston says: "Brave Orchid, My mother, who is champion talker tells stories not for entertainment but

from need” (*Woman Warrior* 202). She has influenced Kingston’s ideologies, and is an important character in most of her novels. Kingston imbibes this gift from her. Kingston hears at home village ditties about Li Po and Tu Fu and classical Chinese poetry plus other chants and myths. Kingston’s stories are about people who speak a dialect and no language, and they “talk story” in that dialect. She feels stories sound ambiguous because that is how oral tradition is. She tells Arturo Islas and Marilyn Yalom: “So the way I tried to solve this problem was to keep ambiguity in the writing all the time” (qtd. in Skenazy 31). She maintains this ambiguity when she transfers Chinese culture, from oral tradition to written tradition satisfactorily. She doesn’t want to have one single, drab meaning or ending. For this she says: “I try to keep the stories with that extra little doubt in them. I throw it in. I can’t help it, it seems to be part of every story” (qtd. in Skenazy 31). Taking cue from their ethos they tap their communal resources because it is rich in culture, history and folk-lore.

Ethnic identities defy oral traditions and write to express themselves. *The Woman Warrior* begins by showing the traditional community and its oral tradition at its worst. The novel begins with the warning ‘You must not tell anyone’ (3) in the words of Kingston’s mother; defied by Kingston, who violates this law and writes and also preserves culture by writing. But writing makes stories static so the dynamism is lost. In “No Lost Paradise” Rabine says, “Kingston’s writing enacts what the swordswoman learns in her mystical vision of the dancing couple, that nothing is identical to itself but is always something else as well. The difference between, the logic of opposition, the law of gender that protests patriarchal genealogy, gives way to a difference within” (484). The desire to preserve culture by Brave Orchid in her daughter is strong, and she would

like the daughter to inherit it as fully as possible. But the daughter thinks on different lines and adapts the ethnic culture selectively to suit her times and her tastes.

Black English power comes from its tradition and oral language structure. Giovanni says: “Black people come from an oral tradition, we sat by the fire and told tales; we tended flocks and rapped poems. We had a beginning and an end for we didn’t know what tomorrow would bring” (*Prosaic* 120). Giovanni’s writing style certainly emerges from the oral traditions of the past. Her choice of words when read has a sonorous quality to it and there is a rhythmic pattern which creates an unconscious body movement. Margaret B. McDowell says that “like a folk singer she senses the close relationship of poetry with music, since her poetry, like music depends on sound and rhythm and is incomplete without oral performance and without an audience” (186). The staccato style of Black writing is a clear example. Giovanni’s emphasis is on orality and the sound of language since the impact is immediate, unlike dead letters on a written page. One senses her urge to communicate to a person in flesh and blood, because in print it is an invisible reader.

While transferring from the oral to the written there is a certain style and rhythmic beat which is also transferred. While reading the poems of Giovanni the rhythms and the beat are not lost. By listening to her one feels the unfolding of the Oral Tradition of past African American culture through the staccato style of her poems. The word staccato has an Italian origin and is connected to music. It refers to the crisp, distinct, abrupt and separate notes of music. Through this style, which sounds like the beating of a drum she reveals her African cultural past, which cannot be erased, even in these modern times.

Her poems in English reflect her African sentiments and pride of Black heritage. Often her writing becomes speech like, a reminder of the Black Oral tradition. Giovanni says:

I wanta say just gotta say something
 bout those beautiful beautiful beautiful outasight
 black men
 with they afros
 walking down the street
 is the same ol danger
 but a brand new pleasure [. . .] (*Collected Poetry* 70)

Giovanni writes in the street chant commonly utilized in the 1960s Black Arts Movement. This Movement spans the period from the 1960 to the mid 1970. Black Power was associated with a militant advocacy of armed self defense and separation from racist American domination, and pride and assertion of Blackness. The Black Arts movement was regarded as the aesthetic and spiritual sister of Black Power. Blacks gave the example that one does not have to assimilate and that one must do one's own thing. The Black Arts movement inspired a lot of Black people to write. Giovanni also challenges the primacy of western values. She redefines the Black man and puts him in his proper perspective in relation to other men and to the world. With the publishing of *Black Feeling Black Talk/Black Judgement* Giovanni earned the reputation of being militant, revolutionary and writing political poetry.

At one time the mainstream looked down on the oral tradition as a “lower cultural development” and spoke highly of the written word. Virginia C. Fowler a friend and colleague in Introduction to *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni* says that,

Giovanni has “less reverence for the written word than for the spoken” (xxi). She reads her poems aloud in public and “as a poet she equates the survival of her people with their ability to use the only thing left them, their ‘human voice’” (*Collected Poetry* xxiii).

Ethnic writers are good storytellers. They use their ethnic story telling techniques to captivate their readers. Kingston is a story teller like Ts’ai Yen and Brave Orchid. “She has adapted her mother’s way of ‘talking story’ to arrive at meaning” (Rose 14). She makes changes and alterations, which is also part of her story telling technique. Stories are narrated by Kingston in English retaining the convoluted narrative style of Say Yup Chinese dialect. Kingston speaks to Timothy Pfaff: “When I write dialogue for people who are speaking Chinese, I say the words to myself in Chinese and then write them in English, hoping to capture some of the sounds and rhythms and power of Say Yup” (Skenazy 17). She writes about people who speak a dialect and no language and they tell stories or “talk story” in their dialect. Thus, she re-creates in English, what she visualizes in a Chinese situation without losing the rhythms of the dialect. In this way she veritably becomes a new voice. Speaking of her characters she describes the artistic problems she faces with Arturo Islas:

They use Chinese words, and they aren’t just speaking Chinese-Chinese. They’re asking Chinese with an American change in the language, and also they are speaking of the dialect of one little village. So what are you going to do to give readers a sense of this language without just repeating it because then nobody will understand it? (qtd. in Skenazy 27)

Kingston’s hybrid identity has made her write in English with racial accents maintaining the convoluted style of the Say Yup dialect, thus fracturing English and

altering it. She adopts this technique in her novel too, making her style accessible to the mainstream readers, a style marked by individuality of a rare kind. It is not a linear story where everything is explained. She has a convoluted syntax, reflective of Chinese kind of writing, which is confusing. She tells Karen Horton: “Oh I’m very proud of being convoluted. I try to be convoluted. Life is convoluted” (qtd. in Skenazy 11). This seems to be enough justification for writing the convoluted style which sets her apart from the mainstream writers. Thus Kingston takes on uniqueness in both in content and in language from a modern American perspective.

Allen’s story-telling questions and often undercuts Western stereotypes. Allen says: “we are story tellers” (*Spider* 9). Unless one understands their culture and values one cannot enjoy their stories. The stories that emerge from Native Indian cultures have a lot to do with rituals and traditions. Allen says: “Ritual or ceremonial understanding of every aspect of human experience is a central preoccupation of Native Literature [. . .]” (*Song of the Turtle* 14). Native American story telling is circular and not linear. And according to the Western canon the three Aristotelian unities of time, place and action are important. According to Western standards a story is shaped by one hero, one theme, one location and brief time. But time, place and action are used differently in Amer-Indian short stories. In Native American literature the perception is of a people’s collective experience whereas in the Western concept it is a singular perception. In *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* Ephanie is a lesbian, half blood, who learns to accept her sexual orientation and cultural identity rather than to conform to social stereotypes. The narration is cyclic, and Allen deviates from the mainstream’s accepted norms. The story begins with Ephanie recovering after an illness and finding herself alone. After her

marriage to a White man and giving birth to Agnes and Ben she is left high and dry by her husband. She, then, remembers her Indian cousin Stephen. The story is narrated by memory. Allen then narrates Ephanie's early life in the convent school, and how she lived in her Guadalupe tribe. Thus she deviates from the mainstream norms of storytelling and adopts the Laguna method of narration since that is the only way to do justice to the ethnic story. What makes Allen Indian is her turn of mind. Most of the time people talk in English, but they don't talk through English. The way Indians express and write is talking in circles. There is no linear pattern to it as seen in English.

Story telling, for Native Americans, Allen says, is for preserving traditions and for community building. Allen says, "Context is important to understanding our stories, and for Indian people that context is both ritual and historical, contemporary and ancient" (*Spider* 2). Stories are published according to Native Americans in two ways. Stories are written and orally narrated. Allen says, "the-told-on-the-page stories are sensible because they belong to the literary tradition the writer lives and thinks in" (*Spider* 7). Their stories deal with love, death, separation and continuance. Allen says:

Because these facts are basic to our lives, they are basic to our stories. And because we are story tellers, we shape these traditional and historical facts within aesthetic matrices to form significances that carry us beyond (while including) the political, the historical, the sociological, or the psychological. (*Spider* 9)

Giovanni claims that through storytelling in English she is in subtle ways expressing who she really is. In *Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea* Giovanni confirms her position as a powerful truth teller because she is a storyteller. Giovanni goes on to say

that she, like her grandmother, is quilting the black-eyed pea as a part of the American civilization. In “Symphony of the Sphinx” she remembers and describes the patch work in quilting:

I have to remember Africa each night as I lay me down to sleep. The patchwork quilt my Great-Grandmother patched one patch two patch three patches more I learned to count by those patches I learned my numbers by those patches the ones that hit and the many thousand gone I learned my patience by those patches that clove to each other to keep me warm
 Black berries blue berries koala nuts yams
 Of course I remember Africa just
 As Africa remembers
 Me [. . .] (*Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea* 20)

In “In Praise of a Teacher” in this same collection Giovanni says, “I always loved English because whatever human beings are, we are story tellers. It is our stories that give a light to the future” (108).

Even Hasidim express their beliefs through story telling. Hasidism is a mystical movement that opposes rationalism and celebrates the mystery of everyday events. In *Denise Levertov: Poems 1960-67* Levertov borrows and mentions “The Ladder” from the *Tales of the Hasidim: Later Masters* by Martin Buber:

Rabbi Moshe (of Kobryn) taught: It is written: “and dreamed,
 And behold a ladder set up on the earth”. That “he” is every man.
 Every man must know: I am clay, I am one of countless shards of clay, but
 “the top of it reached to heaven” – my soul reaches to heaven; “and behold

angels of God ascending and descending on it”- even the ascent and descent of angels depends on my deeds. (2)

Jacob's Ladder is based on a dream that Jacob saw described in the *Bible*. He sees a ladder reaching out to heaven (*Holy Bible*, Gen. 28:12). The image of the stairs is often repeated. Even in her last collection Levertov mentions the stairway. As seen in “Ancient Stairway” man may be ascending or descending but one can't be sure whether it is “downward or upward?” (*This Great Unknowing* 7) that is, one cannot be sure whether he is really making progress or just moving backwards.

Myths are stories that give us deep insight, and are a language. Myths are paradigmatic models. It is these models that have been shattered and changed by American influence. These four writers have rewritten myths through their ethnic American identity. Kingston re-designs and re-maps old myths in new ways, in her quest for an identity and to be heard. In *Mythologies* Barthes says that myths are signs that are denotative and connotative. And mass culture is marked by the presence and precedence of these myths. It is not just American or English. It is all this and more, communicating central ideas. Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* says, “men do not have with a myth a relationship based on truth but on use: they depoliticize according to their needs” (144). Through a myth one is communicating a message. And through a silent existence it reaches an oral stage. According to Barthes myth is “a type of speech” (109). It is a verbal or visual speech that communicates to its readers. The central metaphor in *The Woman Warrior* is that of the protagonist who is from the days of the Tartars, in China. The myth of Fa Mu Lan is about a woman who fulfils the roles of a daughter, wife, daughter-in law and clan's woman and transcends all ordinariness to speak a peace

language. Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong in “Necessity and Extravagance in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*” says: “Most importantly, Fa Mu Lan’s career shows how one can rise above Necessity and exercise Extravagance without compromising one’s ties to other human beings” (20). In the art of communication, she believes, a myth can communicate far more effectively than mere words. Kingston reconstructs through myth the position and role of women from extreme patriarchal subjection and ethnic minority casteism to one capable of shouldering responsibilities and executing them efficiently. She is logical, professional and has excellent communication skills. She has found her voice and articulates in language her Chinese-American identity. She reveals her way of being a woman warrior on her own behalf and perhaps on behalf of other Chinese girls and women.

Kingston moves from the local to the universal. A national myth is altered so dexterously to include a global thought. She uses an oral myth to explain a modern concept of peace. One notices that Kingston’s work begins with the Fa Mu Lan legend of a woman warrior and convulges into a woman soldier disguised as a male advocating peace in times of war. Waging wars she openly denounces, since wars only lead to massacre. She says, “Whoever the enemy is, they’re related to us” (*Fifth Book* 391) indicating a kind of bond among people. In “What Stories the Winds Would Tell” Patricia Linton says that, it is possible “to appropriate external speech, the discourse of the Other, and alter its significance” (44).

Writers include myths from their own culture enriching English by introducing new myths or awakening in one the realization of similar myths in other cultures too. In *Tripmaster Monkey* Kingston uses the myth of the monkey King. The word “tripmaster”

also refers to one who guides and suggests trips to prevent drug addicts from flipping. Kingston uses the slang of the 60s and describes the psychedelic state of hippies. Kingston falls back on the monkey king from Buddhism and how he goes to India and arrives in America. The Buddhist monkey is called Triptika. Kingston thinks of the monkey as an underdog that has no power so he uses trickery. In *Tripmaster Monkey* the narrator is Kuan Yin, the goddess of mercy, who creates trouble for the characters but always keeps a way out for them.

Each journey of Allen's is to retrieve Native Indian traditions. Allen considers herself to be *kochinnenako* to recreate a Laguna past among non Native Indians and to be a mediator in understanding Native Indian culture. In the poem "Grandmother" Allen describes a speaker mending a rug that the grandmother made. The grandmother is the spider that weaves the strands of her body into creation.

Out of her own body she pushed
 silver thread, light air
 [.]
 Out of her body she extruded
 shining wire, life, and wove the light
 on the void. (*Coyote's 50*)

Allen invokes myth as a story telling tradition. In Laguna tradition women are foregrounded in mythical stories. The Creator is a Great Mother often identified in English translation as Thought or Thinking woman. Thinking Woman is also known as the Spider Woman or Grandmother Spider. She is the great goddess of the Keres Indians. She is like a fairy possessed of magical power. Her sisters are Changing Woman and White Shell

Woman. The Grandmother spider creates things by thinking of them and naming them. This suggests creation, continuity and preservation. Allen is to mend the tear, and reweave the fabric. Allen herself is spider woman placing her will on her readers through the art of narration and weaving her own design of ethnic reality.

Afro-Americans like Le Roi Jones, Don Lee, Carolyn Rogers, and Sonia Sanchez and Larry Neal who belong to the Black Arts Movement attack the myth that White is right. In Giovanni's poem "The True Import of Present Dialogue, Black vs. Negro" demands the killing of Whites. It also expresses a symbolic need on the part of Blacks to kill their own White values:

Can you kill the nigger
in you
Can you make your nigger mind
die [. . .] (*Black Feeling Black Talk* 20)

Giovanni in her works demonstrates that the Black community has absorbed the subtleties of the mainstream language. Her poems move to a celebration of collective Black experience. Being a product of the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement her early works reflect violence, aggression, explosive tendencies and revolutionary ideals. She has changed to ethnic free verse mode. The failure of previous themes catapults her into the here and now of everyday world. Margaret B. Mc Dowell says: "It is my contention that Giovanni's rejection of the pressure to write primarily a didactic, 'useful' political poetry was not only a sign of her integrity but an inevitable sign of her development" (185). From fighting the myth that White is right she goes on to say that "By writing blacks sought truth" (*Prosaic* 125). She retains some of the Afro-

American myths like fertility myths and quilting traditions but in her own special, unique and new way to voice the essentially ethnic concerns. She shifts from partisanism to a more humane and universal outlook.

Levertov in her craftsmanship, mastery of style and in imagery, is contemporary. Her lines are too well-thought-out that sometimes her workmanship goes unnoticed. Myth and ritual are, of course the natural devices of poets who believe that life is not trivial. But Levertov has ritualized the quotidian. With her “voyages”, “journeys”, “communions”, “psalms” and “chants” she has made holy many things unknown to us and one willingly drifts into her world. She has made the secular sacred through her choice of words.

The new peace language that emerges from Kingston is based on the two cultures that influence her, the community and the mainstream. Kingston stands at a point of juxtaposing between a peace loving Chinese culture and a war mongering Western culture. Having gone through both she has opted for peace. And hence her prolific use of the peace language which is remarkable by many standards. Kingston tells Donna Perry:

I am looking for a language of peace. I am trying to rewrite a book of peace. And so maybe that is fighting for the soul, not just of Chinese American people, but the human soul. I want the human soul to be one where people care for one another and where people cherish and nourish and value one another [. . .] (qtd. in Skenazy 184)

This shows a change in her attitudes. Instead of writing and seizing on Chinese American rights alone, she writes for promoting global peace. Kingston, as an artist, establishes a

new sense, a new relationship not with America or China alone but by challenging the consciousness of the people by a peace language.

Losing ethnic language, the first and second generation people of diverse linguistic and cultural origins become citizens of a unified community. Kingston dreams of establishing a world fraternity. The entire humanity is a web so when it is cut somewhere the fabric is weakened. Kingston's language of peace has a vocabulary of its own. She makes use of words like "peace movement", "peace activist", "non-violence", "civil disobedience" to reinforce her idea of a peace language. Fully convinced of the need for a peace language she tells her audience to create something in a moment of peace – a poem, a parade, a friendship, or one peaceful moment. In her Epilogue she says:

The images of peace are ephemeral. The language of peace is subtle. The reasons for peace, the definitions of peace, the very idea of peace have to be invented, and invented again. (*Fifth Book* 402)

Using English, ethnic identities avoid erasure and erase certain wrong notions of ethnic minorities – that is, when a nation colonizes it colonizes the language also. The language of the colonizer becomes the language of the colonized. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* says: "A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language [. . .] Mastery of language affords remarkable power" (18). Immigrants to America learn English and with the same tool they write themselves into the centre. Kingston says:

Writing is like meditation: you sit breathing in silence, only you add one thing – the writing [. . .] Dave said it: Writing, you change. And you change the world, even the past. You make history. (*Fifth Book* 266)

To write, to change and to make history one needs a memory to fall back on. When one approaches memories with words they get clearer. Words can clarify one's vision and memory. Paula Rabine says that Kingston banks on the unconscious in which memories are stored. Memory and imagination translate the unconscious into language. "The unconscious," says Kofman, "is 'unheimlich' - uncanny but also without a home" (Rabine 481). In her conversation with Paula Rabinowitz Kingston says that only "[. . .] words are a medium to get to the seemingly subconscious [. . .] Words clarify the vision and memory" (Rabinowitz 178). Memory is insignificant, except when it is a cause for the foundation for the rest of personality. The second level of memory is taken over by language. Then one concentrates on what is happening in real life, right now. A good imagination helps to bridge reality with words and lets paper carry these experiences.

Kingston says:

I hold up the paper and say, 'Write things out, and you won't need to carry memories in your body as pain. The paper will carry your stories. We, your readers, will help you carry your stories. See how light paper is?' (*Fifth Book* 266)

Indicating a radical shift in her use of language Kingston's style has changed from solitary writing to community writing. Her cosmopolitan outlook has made her use language as a powerful instrument of change. As a part of individuation she decides writing in a community is better than writing in solitude. Before the fire when Kingston

wrote, she preferred solitude. This still made her feel narrow and lonely. Today she perceives a global community across all cultural divisions. She says: “No more solitary. I need a community of like minds” (*Fifth Book* 62). But today to write she requires a community which is global and not Chinese or Chinese-American alone. In *Conversations* she tells Seshachari: “I can feel our group energy pushing me to work better” (qtd. in Skenazy 197). While writing in a global community the outcome is **threefold more** tolerance, a broader vision, a greater peace and a fellow feeling. Kingston says in an Interview to Maggie Ann Bowers in *Writing across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk*:

I feel that a mature . . . human being first understands oneself and then, considers the other. First there is compassion for oneself and then, for it to be true compassion, it has to go out to one who is not the same as oneself. I see my work going from a self-centered narcissistic world into a larger world. I think there is always a struggle in people to break out of narcissism, to feel the emotions of others. I think a great writer has to be empathetic to people who are seen to be different. (qtd. in Nasta 180-181)

Kingston wishes to create a global community of tolerance where people care for each other, lay down their weapons and promote world peace. Through language she moves from the ethnic community concept to the world community concept. And to Shelley Fisher Fishkin, she says: “I think of myself as somebody who’s been given a gift of an amazing literary voice, and so I want to be the voice of the voiceless” (qtd. in Skenazy 19, 165).

Writing is a tool for preservation of culture. And this is the case even for ethnic writers though the mainstream's ethnocentrism tries to erase writers of ethnic identity. One finds Foucault's rhetorical question "what is an author?" and Roland Barthes' rhetorical answer: "The author is dead" complementary. King-Kok Cheung in "Articulate Silences" says, "For an author to be 'dead', she or he must first have lived. Asian-American writers are just beginning to live" (23). Chinese-American writers struggle to preserve their ethnic culture through their writing, and back home they are considered the lost ones who deserted the native society for the sake of greener pastures.

Even Giovanni is accused of "fossilization" that is, retaining certain aspects of Afro-American culture in her language. She refashions English to accommodate her experiences. But in the written word communication is only through the silent word. So meaning could be ambiguous if apt words are not used. It must be remembered that to facilitate communication and wide readership communication is from the vernacular English to a standard English and from the oral to the written.

Allen writes and preserves as a part of survival. She talks of survival in *The Sacred Hoop*:

One's emotions are ones own; to suggest that others should imitate them is to impose on the personal integrity of others. The tribes seek – through song, ceremony, legend, sacred stories (myths), and tales – to embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated, private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of the majesty and reverent mystery of all things, and to actualize, in language, those truths that give to humanity its greatest significance and dignity. (55)

These writers want to participate in the mainstream American culture in so far as it leads to survival. Meeting of cultures marks the process, even as these writers attempt to be uniquely individualistic, all the while retaining what is their own –in terms of ethnicity, traditions and highly personalized symbols. Allen continues in *The Sacred Hoop*: “Through language one can share one’s singular being with that of the community and know within one’s self the communal knowledge of the tribe [. . .] the fundamental and sacred spring of life is given voice and being for all”. (55)

In the writings of ethnic writers readers feel the presence of binary opposition. And it is always in the logic of “ambiguity” that a text is woven (Rabine 482). One senses the binary opposition of two cultures and recognizes that the ethnic writer’s use of language is different from the mainstream writer’s use of it as presented in this language. As a result of this dichotomy the element of intranslatability builds up the accusation of the writer being inauthentic. A language always carries its culture. But when a hybrid writes there will be ambiguity. So writing of one culture into another culture’s language is a kind of problematisation. Readers by and large understand the other language. And when the culture and the thought process of the other is understood, language becomes secondary since it is only a tool. The understanding of the other is located in language. Then one says that language racially defines the writer. Fanon remarks: “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization”(*Black Skin White Masks* 17-18). It may be inferred, in the light of the above analysis, that but for ethnic writing it would be impossible to understand many ethnic cultures and their riches.

In *China Men* Kingston describes a new technique of paying back through language. The Chinese labourers were not to speak while working on the plantations. But Bak Goong the great grandfather is gifted with language; he has a good ear for alien dialects and even for barbarian speech. He attempts to subvert the oppressive control exerted by the white overseers: he tries ignoring the ban and is fined; he tries singing his comments and gets whipped. Finally he uses his coughing to expel what is inside him.

When the demons howled to work faster, faster he coughed in reply. The deep, long, loud coughs, barking and wheezing, were almost as satisfying as shouting. He let out scolds disguised as coughs [. . .] All Chinese words conveniently a syllable each, he said “Get–that–horse– dust–away–from– me–you–dead–white-demon” [. . .] He felt better after having his say.

(102)

To prove this point Patricia Linton quotes in “What Stories the Wind Would Tell” what, Bakhtin asserts when he says, “It is naïve to suppose that one can assimilate as one’s own an external speech that runs counter to one’s inner speech, that is, runs counter to one’s whole inner verbal manner of being aware of oneself and the world” (44). It is difficult for a first generation immigrant and less difficult for future generations.

Meaning changes from time to time, place to place, and person to person. Cultures are not always mutually intelligible but it is crucial, to understand texts in their own specific worlds of meaning. For ethnic identities writing is an integral part of self-definition. Victoria Myers says:

Utterances are not created in a vacuum but with purpose and in relation to a context, or rather, as I would say, in relation to contexts intricately

embedded in each other: the context of the kind (or purpose) of the utterance, as well as the context of the physical, psychological and cultural phenomena which determine its interpretation. When children learn their language they learn not only its grammar, but also the customs and values of the community. (113)

Kingston makes use of several narrative techniques to strengthen her ideologies and to arrive at her objectives. She subverts gender roles in both *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*. In *The Woman Warrior* instead of a man, it is a woman who disguises as a male and leads the army into battle. She emerges victorious and acts as a saviour of her family and village. In *China Men* Tang Aao is captured by women and taken to the Land of Women. He is prepared to meet the Queen. For this, his body hair is plucked. His feet are broken and bound, and his ears are pierced. He is made to appear as a woman. Kingston through this technique highlights the pain experienced by women because of patriarchal, societal norms. She tries to conscientize genders about the difficulty of being the opposite sex. At the same time in *The Woman Warrior* she reveals that only a woman can be more than a woman, especially in places where men fail.

Giovanni has published several collections of poems for children with illustrations. Children's poems are related to feelings of Black children, warmth, blackness, dance and love. Giovanni says: "I like to think that if truth has any bearing on art, my poetry and prose is art because it is truthful" (*Prosaic* 247). Giovanni rediscovers and evaluates the introduction and validation of the blues, jazz, ballads, sermons and black idiom as poetic material. The music and Black arts tradition appeared in Giovanni as creative writing. Another technique Giovanni uses Mozella G. Mitchell reports is that

“she recites some of her poetry to the background of gospel music” (136). Some of her poems read like incantations. The poems in *Black Feeling/Black Talk and Black Judgement* contain black consciousness raising, chatty lyrics, ritual recitations and appear as a kind of ritualistic exorcism. For instance in the six lines “Poem (No Name No.2)”:

Bitterness Black Brothers

Bitter Black Get

Blacker Get Bitter

Get Black Bitterness

NOW [. . .] (*Collected Poetry* 18)

This type of exorcistical chant is seen in some poems of a confessional nature revealing revolutionary rhetoric. Giovanni has a glib, wise-cracking overly conversational style that makes her popular. It is strongly influenced by rhythm and blues music.

Paula Giddings, herself a noted figure in the poetry world, says that Giovanni is perhaps more mellow from the past, “but like wine, her poems have a clarity that comes only with ageing, though the word is figuratively applied” (Gould 340). Her poems show maturity from the angry verse to the confessional mould her poems take. She moves on to a plane of a “human voice” perceiving a humanist world-view where individuals take their place in the scheme of things.

Harry Marten in his book *Understanding Denise Levertov* (1988) has observed that Levertov’s later poems serve to be a conclusive proof that the poet has become “increasingly convinced that the exercise of the imagination moves one towards faith” (17). Diane Wakoski says that Levertov’s poetry, like that of most American mystics, is grounded in Christianity, but like Whitman and other American mystics, her discovery of

God is the discovery of God in herself and an attempt to understand how that self is a “natural part of the world, intermingling with everything pantheistically, ecologically, socially, historically and, for Levertov, always lyrically” (252). Levertov’s style is to speak an orthodox faith of love with a vision of the attractive and the terrible yoked together.

Giovanni is an Afro-American writer of split subjectivity. She retells the collective experience of her people. H.H. Anniah Gowda in “If I am not for myself, who is for me?” a review of Ronald Segal’s *The Black Diaspora* in *The Hindu* dated 20 Aug. 1995 says that Afro- Americans hold the name of Africa dear as “an idealised common homeland, taking pride in African achievements in sport, supporting African liberation movements and exercising their educational options in the direction of African Studies, although few show signs of any desire to return to Africa to live” (xiii). Despite their yearning for African roots they continue to live in the American society fighting cultural ethnic battles of the losing kind, yet they persevere to voice their protests using language as an effective instrument.

Giovanni has mastered English most naturally being a fourth generation immigrant. She takes her revenge by resisting representation and writing. Remembering the tribal language of her ancestors, she is conscious that she has come a long way from that. Suzanne Juhasz in *Naked and Fiery Forms* says “women use words in ways that men don’t, or cant, but that many of their ways are different and that their ways are for the purpose of expressing in art their real selves, not the selves that have been created for them” (202). Giovanni reveals her real self in her Afterword to an anthology compiled by her. She says:

We are asking that you listen, not to our words they are foreign, they are of a foreign language, but to our rhythms. And don't hear the rhythms with your ears – ours is a deeper drum. You must come closer, you must come inside to hear our rhythms. (*Night Comes Softly* 83)

They speak in a new voice, which partakes of the agonized cries of an oppressed ethnic minority. So Giovanni uses English to represent herself as she thinks herself to be and not as a mere representative of community. This subjectivity leads to a kind of lyrical solipsism. Though, she is sometimes confessional in her works she writes from her personal experiences rather than being a mouth piece of her people. Martha Cook quotes Giovanni:

“When I write poetry, . . . I write out of my own experiences—which also happens to be the experiences of my people. But if I had to choose between my people’s experiences and mine, I’d choose mine, because that is what I know best”. (191)

Her writing in English is a kind of subversion to the erasure of her own respective cultural heritages. The rhythmic and lyrical qualities; vivid imagery, shifting moods, tones and atmospheres, and the liquid flow of words and phrases combine to reveal her enormous skill. Her works are about change and the challenge needed to affect change, which indicates her growth as a writer. Giovanni says that, “only a fool doesn’t change” (Mozella G. Mitchell 145). From her initial interest in outside issues she moves towards family-love and formulates a humanist world-view.

Giovanni likes journalism and thinks of innovative ideas to express herself.

Aware of the uselessness of words in the poem “Straight Talk” she says:

i'm giving up
 on language
 my next book will be blank
 pages of various textures and hues
 i have touched in
 certain spots and patterns [. . .] (*My House* 31)

In the process of writing English with racial accents “an english (sic) ‘emerges’ from English it establishes itself as distinct and separate” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 56). Ethnic writers learn to curse their masters in their own tongue. One finds that they break all rules and add values and rules of their own. Migration, transplantation, and cross fertilization change the nature and texture of the English language. Though the ethnic identities feel an otherness writing in English, the shadow of the dominant discourse English hovers over them. Yet they adopt new techniques to avoid gaps in understanding because of cultural differences. As described in the introduction to *The Empire Writes Back*:

Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of “truth”, “order”, and “reality” become established [. . .] language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has been wrested from the dominant European culture.

(Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 7-8)

Ethnic identities use language with a sheer inventiveness attempting to re contextualise identity. Giovanni believes that change is necessary for growth. In the autobiographical

“My Poem” Giovanni writes about her fears of being attacked because she was involved in the movement fighting for her people’s rights. Don L. Lee says:

Nikki writes about the familiar what she knows, sees, experiences. It is clear why she conveys such urgency in expressing the need for Black awareness, unity, solidarity. She knows how it was. She knows how it is. She knows also a change can be affected. (182)

Giovanni’s poetry is renowned for its call of urgency for Black people to realize their identities and understand their surroundings as part of a white-controlled culture.

Giovanni continues to write, speak and teach about the history and future of Black people and has become a symbol of the Black Arts Movement, as well as for Black women and women writers today.

Allen being bicultural her stories reflect Western and tribal aesthetics. The ethnic social life is replete with vibrant symbols but this is in contrast to the dry West. Native Indians live in a world of symbols and images where the spiritual and the mundane criss-cross. To Indians symbols are part of nature, part of the social fabric, even little insects like ants and grasshoppers take on extraordinary significance since they are vibrant symbols of their belief systems. Writers like Allen revel in the beauty and naturalness of the real world as revealed in the Native Indian topographical set up. She uses images and symbols from the natural world in her poems. Speaking to Eysturoy, Allen says:

Certainly my own writing comes out of the consciousness of my own landscape, where I come from, the trees and the mesas I climbed, my physical interaction with where I was. To me that is the real world. To me American writers tend to think of the real world as ugly, social stuff. They

focus on reality as being the yucky things that people do. To me reality is the natural world, and the yucky social stuff, like ugly cities or dreadful political conditions, is the artificiality. (16)

The language Allen uses is powerful and cutting as seen in the poem “Displacement”:

If I had a metaphorical knife
 and a metaphorical thick cutting board
 and a whole pile of translucent metaphors
 I would slice them finely and watch
 them quiver in the light [. . .] (*Coyote’s* 12)

Allen combines words to express her self-confessedly inarticulate state. The images of incidents lying at the back of her mind embalmed by words are seen in her poem “Brain Child, Atrophied” in *Star Child*:

I had words with you
 instead of babies: images
 put there – in acid
 or alkaline to bear and be –
 [.]
words together.
 Never birthed
 never blown. Those words
 encased in skull bone
 were safely hidden away.
 Immured.

Entombed.

Giovanni's poems are rich in imagery and figures of speech. In "Life Cycles" she says:

she boxed her life
 like a special private seed
 planting it in her emotional garden
 to see what weeds
 would rise
 to strangle
 her [. . .] (*Cotton* 53)

Adapting to her poetic needs in English Giovanni is able to craft well-wrought lines enveloped in rich imagery. Besides for her writing is a way of connecting. She says: "We are less lonely when we connect. Art is a connection. I like being a link. I hope the chain will hold" (*Prosaic* 254).

For Giovanni poetry is a vital link of relatedness, one person speaking to many, in a spirit of camaraderie and even intimacy. This is a need being fulfilled for an ethnic community suffering at the hands of a formidable master race. Giovanni's desire to write is primarily a didactic one. In her own concise way she has touched and captured with words what it is to be a Black woman in a white America, what it is to be a victim of discrimination. As a result she is more personal than universal. What she tries to do is not just protest but communicate the causes of the protest in a language evolving itself into a new voice.

The image of weaving recurs often in Allen's works. As seen in the poem "Woman's Day 1975": "The highway/spin out from me like a spider's thread" (*Coyote's* 22). In the poem "Affirmation" Allen says, "So, grandmother / your gifts still go with me / unseen /" in (*Coyote's* 19). Again in "Lilies of the Field Are as children Growing" she mentions the, "spidery arms of a child/" (*Coyote's* 30). Allen has edited a collection of short stories with an editor's note giving it the title of *Spiderwoman's Granddaughters*. These are tales of excellent tribal women's voices from the 1850s to the 1990s. Spider woman is a powerful metaphor of strength, resilience, and re-construction of tribal ideologies and value systems. Allen is a quintessential spider-woman weaving her works for many grandchildren, both the mainstream and Indian, proving all the while that she can dislocate and adapt a new language to suit her purpose of recreating ethnic relationships.

Allen dislocates language to her artistic needs. She represents the Native American Indians, she forges ahead in her writings, using language as an invincible instrument of ventilation. Exploring the potentials of her poetic language she also makes use of several images of environment like in "Coyote Jungle" in her collection *Star Child*:

He doesn't understand
that the furrow on his
forehead was transferred
from the furrows he once turned
in the land, embedded there.

Levertov as part of her eco-poetry sketches very revealing and telling images of the ravages of the earth. She has an inexhaustible treasure of Judeo-Christian imagery and Biblical language too –an example is the poem “Mass for the Day of St Thomas Didymus”.

“During the Eichmann Trial” in *Jacob’s Ladder* is a hint of man’s lack of concern for others. Eichmann stands for everyman. Part II is about a young boy’s murder for stealing fruit. In part II she mentions the yellow star (representative of Jewish faith). The Star of David also called the Shield of David is the symbol of Judaism. The Star of David appears on the flag of the state of Israel, in synagogues, in Jewish ritual objects and on emblems of various organizations. The Star is a combination of two triangles that interlace to form a six-pointed star. Levertov cleverly weaves several Jewish images to bring in a newness to her craft.

White mainstream Americans believed that English could confer civilization on the colonies. Having stripped the native Indian off everything, the mainstream psychologically brainwashed the American Indian by virtually imposing English through education on him. And Allen by writing in English has created an awareness of mainstream’s atrocities, and preserved a rich culture. This may be analyzed in the light of the pronouncement of Barthes on the subject. Barthes envisages reading as a dialectical interaction between the reader and language whose product is the text. The production of the text involves the “debate of the subject and the other, and the social context . . .” (36). The text is not a static entity from which fixed signifieds can eternally be derived but a fluid historical space open to multiple readings. Thus the activity of reading is seen as

invariably historical, social and political. The focus shifts entirely to the reader who gives the text multiple levels of meaning.

The mainstream hegemony has colonized the minds of the reader. Stereotyped images of Native Americans are challenged by Allen. Readers are provoked to think of other levels of meaning while reading a text. Despite knowing Laguna her native tongue, Allen writes only in English to propagate ethnic values, and to highlight the salient features of Native Indian culture. However painful and complex it is to define herself Allen pushes herself forward to do so opting for a language of a wider currency. She changes to become a significant voice. Allen in the poem “Off Reservation Blues” writes:

If my language is oblique
 misunderstandable –
 if I confine myself
 within demands of imaged time –
 [.]
 this sharpness of tongue,
 this blade to cut your heart out
 and offer it to the sun
 must stay quiet awhile. (*Shadow* 26)

Writing itself is never created in a vacuum. The author has to rely on his memory, experience, consciousness and his personal reservoir of images, thus creating for himself a space and thus expressing his resistance. And writing in an alien tongue makes one feel proud that one has done the impossible. Thus working in new Englishes, can be a therapeutic act of resistance. It is also remaking a colonial language to reflect the

postcolonial experiences. Many of these ethnic writers are constrained to confront themselves in the arena of language. The antithetical relationship between the two languages, the personal options, the changing linguistic loyalty, the abandonment of one language for the sake of the other are all symptomatic of the dilemma of most ethnic writers. The painful decision is arrived at the cost of their own integrity, loyalty and belief systems.

Levertov, Kingston Giovanni and Allen have undertaken to appropriate the English language as a kind of subversion successfully. They have reflected their cultural heritage as a way of turning America into yet another aspect of their own culture. Thirdly it is symptomatic of a poetic process of pickling native words for preservation beyond easy decay and erasure at the hands of a bulldozing mainstream culture. This trend is noticed in the ethnic writers of Asian, African and Latin American backgrounds too.

Colonization and the subsequent modernization at the behest of the mainstream are found resulting in the loss of identity of the Laguna culture. Allen successfully fights this erosion by making use of Laguna words as the staple of her poetic discourse. Yet the conflict between the two linguistic traditions continues. And this is where the poet's language survives despite heavy odds. Thus dislocating language into new relationships becomes a challenging task for the simple reason that the poet in question has been brought up in the linguistic environment of the mainstream language. In *The Sacred Hoop* the effects of colonization are discussed by Allen. She says: “[. . .] the fragile web of identity, that long held tribal people secure has gradually been weakened and torn. But the oral tradition has prevented the complete destruction of the web, the ultimate disruption of tribal ways” (45). They are through their writings communicating to

posterity not to forget their ethos. Allen regularly uses the concept of the web, while partaking of the Laguna view of the world as a spider's web with inter-linking of infinite kinds. Just as a spider's web is spun out of its own entrails the author seems to spin the yarns of folk lore and myths out of her own artistic self inspired by the Laguna ethos and values.

Allen's style is influenced by Denise Levertov, who, subscribes to the school of Black Mountain Poets. Her style is concise, pithy and well-wrought lines characterized by speech heightened and purified. Allen writes about mysticism, mythology and occult from an objectivist stance. Her transitional voice is seen in *Blind Lion* (1974) her first volume of poetry, published by her. Speaking of this voice in *Blind Lion* Allen says: "*The Blind Lion* covers that whole period, and here and there you can hear what's eventually going to be Paula" (Bruchac 10). She evolves her own style articulating in order to express which is imagistic, concise, pithy and cleverly crafted. Her poems reveal her practical and spiritual attitude to life.

Caught between cultures, Allen becomes progressively more articulate to preserve Laguna culture in all its originality. She says in "The Turning Point":

The language of my mind slips daily out of phase
unlocking secrets I have no word, no image for. I
write words backwards, leave the familiar shore [. . .] (*Coyote's* 31)

Denise Levertov writes in a borrowed language but leaves her cultural hallmark through certain techniques. Levertov leaves behind traces of new rhythms but unlike the others she does not have many limitations imposed by community and the mainstream on her. But her dialectics is against the mainstream ideologies. As a young poet she says she

was, “drawn primarily to the structure or technique of poems” and when she grew older she finds herself “concerned with content” (*Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* 2). Levertov writes poems of an “inner harmony” (*Poet in the World* 5), which may be a contrast to the confusion around.

Levertov’s language is minimal, tight and is sparing in word and phrase. This can be illustrated in “Deciphering”:

When I lose my center
of gravity
I can’t fly:
levitation’s
a stone
cast straight as a lark[. . .] (*Oblique Prayers* 3)

She has mastered economy and in minimalist words she communicates what is breathtaking and unnerving.

Levertov’s poetry is modelled on the lines of Projective Verse of Charles Olson. It is an inner discovery of outer perceptions. It is, by nature, meditative. She searches for new rhythms in the milieu of Black Mountain Poets. She has been influenced by William Carlos Williams’ idea of objectivity. Objectivists look at the inward gaze of an outward thing. These new influences and new rhythms are seen in the title piece of *The Overland to the Islands*:

the dog disdains on his way,
nevertheless he
keeps moving, changing

pace and approach but
not direction – ‘every step an arrival’.

(*Collected Earlier Poems 1940-60* 55)

Levertov’s poetry is categorized as belonging to the neo-romantic school because her poems are emotional, musical, and there is no use of very precise images. She says: “I believe every space and comma is a living part of the poem and has its function, just as every muscle and pore of the body has its function. And the way the lines are broken is a functionary part essential to the poem’s life” (*Poet in the World* 3). Wordsworth says: “Language is not the *dress* but the *incarnation* of thoughts” (qtd.in *Poet in the World* 16). There occurs a hiatus between thoughts and feelings. As she says: “I believe content determines and yet that content is discovered only in form” (*Poet in the World* 3). This is similar to Gerard Manley Hopkins talks of “inscape” and “instress”. “Inscape” denotes the intrinsic form-pattern. “Instress” is experiencing the perception of inscape or the apperception of inscape i.e. the force of experiencing inscape.

Paul A. Lacey has written an Afterword “A Note on the Text” in the last volume *This Great Unknowing* that Levertov wrote only in longhand and kept revising and reworking. She was as meticulous in her readings as well as her writings. Paul A. Lacey says of Levertov:

Though the artist as craftsman is making discrete (sic) and autonomous works . . . the artist as explorer in language of the experiences of his or her life is, willy-nilly, weaving a fabric, building a whole in which each discrete work is a part that functions in some way in relation to all the others. (*This Great Unknowing* 65)

Levertov from a spiritual longing and spiritual experience today towers above all for her fiery words denouncing the mainstream America's war policies and ecological destruction. Her poems emerge as eco-poetry and this is one of the most subversive techniques used against capitalism and the mainstream values. Her poems are modernistic to satisfy any avant-garde editor. In the poem "Urgent Whisper" she speaks of the earth and her scarred lungs and tight chest making an urgent whisper as to how the earth given to us by god is desecrated. The earth is like a child beaten up and is waiting for the next blow:

a silent delicate trembling no one spoke of,
 as if a beaten child or a captive animal
 lay waiting the next blow. (*Life Around Us 20*)

Despite being a Christian with a Jewish background Levertov seems to assume that nature is inviolable and a sacred presentation of divinity. This spiritual orientation is manifest in her later writings. But all the while she seems to be veering round to a poetic style marked by liturgical components, Christian hymns of devotion and so on. Thus stylistically she is closer to a religious tradition than to free verse.

These four authors have used language as a veritable instrument of communication, not uniformly successful but yet powerful and effective in evoking the responses they want to evoke. Their stylistic devices, their diction and even manipulation of grammar all contribute to their attempt to find a voice for the voiceless – the oppressed ethnic groups sidelined, marginalized and even decimated at the cultural, social, and political levels. The sometimes epigrammatic and broken constructions clearly indicate the brokenness of the lives they describe vicariously. Yet the level of authenticity is high

owing to the fact that most of the traumatic experiences they give expression to are in many ways their own. The way they manipulate language points to a search for identity and self assertion when faced with the formidable, monolithic mainstream culture which is often found to be encroaching upon the ethnic identities. The style of these writers is as much aggressive as it is introspective, being deeply aware of the inadequacies and failures of their own respective ethnic societies. What stands out is the highly powerful presentation of the lived experiences of their unfortunate bretheren, who, by circumstances, have been uprooted and transgressed upon by forces which are extraordinarily devoid of the norms of tolerance, much less, acceptance. While dislocating language into new relationships and for re-discovering ethnic affiliations these writers set new trends rolling across barriers separating and segregating the human family in the latter-day social milieu which seems to be effecting a cultural osmosis despite differences of many kinds.

CHAPTER VI

THE SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS OF RELATIONSHIPS

Spirituality enables us to feel a deep connection between one another. It heals and avoids the fragmented self [. . .]
– Charlene Spretnak, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*

There is a great difference between spirituality and organized religion. Spirituality is something very personal. It is a way of life rather than a series of ritualistic practices. A thinking person is on a spiritual quest for answers, going through the furnace of life. He is stimulated by change and development in his inner life. He can anchor himself firmly on some belief system only if it has answers to most of the mysteries of life. Ursula King says in *Women and Spirituality*: “Spirituality is thus the very leaven of human life” (107). It transforms life since it is totally dynamic. It takes up question after question looking for answers, new meanings. Spirituality is a life giving experience to the sensitive God oriented person.

Human beings have developed a new spirituality after realizing the inter-dependence of all living and non-living forms on earth. Spiritual dynamics is always a process or system sustained by change or activity. When things of this world become meaningful, one is able to see the spirit of God in all things. This kind of spirituality transcends materialism. The presence of God in one's life becomes a very personal experience which cannot be shared easily except by competent communicators like these four writers.

A person is said to be spiritually deep not in mere bookish knowledge of the Holy texts, but when he/she can see and feel the presence of God in all things. He/she is able to

commune with God. On becoming spiritual one realizes one's puny might is nothing in comparison with the mighty power of God. Not for a moment does one feel one is anything next to God. There is a deep awareness of one's inadequacies. Men and women can attain perfection on earth through a direct personal relationship with God.

Spiritually Levertov, Giovanni, Kingston and Allen are writers who have the same goal, and culturally they have different goals. But the way they integrate their experiences of life with their belief system is what makes them unique. For example, for Giovanni any form of goodness is divine enough despite the fact that she has no faith in a personal God. Effie J. Boldridge says that Nikki Giovanni is one of the profoundly human writers whose work reflects her idealism and hope living in a discontented age. She has her "lasting faith in the true goodness and greatness of man" (206). All these four authors have highly individualistic modes of presenting their spiritual dynamics.

Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen are writers who at some time or the other have been exposed to a set of beliefs and behavioral patterns that belong to their ethnic identity. Exposure to American culture has diffused their beliefs. This exposure, in turn, has adulterated their ethnic beliefs and convictions, leading to hybridization of beliefs and behavioral patterns concretized in them. They redeem themselves from their dilemmas by regenerating a new life, and falling back on the new hybridized beliefs.

In the case of Levertov the formation of the hybrid identity can be seen as a change from her Christian beliefs to a belief system which is a hybrid of her Christian beliefs and the dormant Hasidic influence on her. In her response to a questionnaire from a journal *Religion and Intellectual Life* 1984, Levertov herself says, "I cannot simply

enter a ready-made structure; I have to find components and construct my own” (*Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* 245). On exposure to American culture, she confronts experiences which are incongruent with her Christian beliefs. For survival in the new environment, she modifies her belief system by adding elements from the dormant Hasidic culture which was induced by her father, a Russian Hasidic Jew. Hasidism is a movement in modern Judaism which believes in the omnipresence of God, that divine light and power touch everything, and so give no cause for unhappiness. Levertov implies that an approach to God has a driving force behind the universe which cannot be separated from her commitment to this earth and all its unlimited graces. For her Alma Natura is just the other side of divinity, as exemplified in numerous ecological poems of hers. In “Tragic Error” in *The Life Around Us* she says:

Surely our task
 was to have been
 to love the earth,
 To dress and keep it like Eden’s garden. (12)

Ethnic writers have a greater concern for the larger community. Levertov projects America as an urban garden of racism, war, imperialism, ecological devastation and nuclear parks. She says that poetry is high which comes from a social conscience about “‘man’s inhumanity to man’ – and to the earth, and all that is in it” (*Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* 139). She wants to articulate change in America and in America’s relationship to other nations, which stems from convictions in her own relationships and Hasidism. She speaks against nuclear test site and war. She critiques the

the dry and hostile earth, its dusty growth
of low harsh plants, sparse in unceasing wind;
could almost have bent
to kiss that leper face. (53)

Levertov makes us aware of the dangers of war, global warming, pollution, degradation of natural environment and nuclear world. In this aggressive and technocratic world a radical change for the better is required. In “Protesting at the Nuclear Test Site” in *The Life Around Us* she describes the earth being ravaged:

deep, deep and narrow the holes were bored
into the land’s innards, and there, in savage routine,
Hiroshima blasts exploded, exploded, rape
repeated month after month for years. (21)

This plea and attempt to make the world nuclear free is a paradigm shift from her previous attitudes in just delighting in the sights and sounds of nature and from there launching herself into mystical heights.

Levertov is a poet with social commitment. She speaks against war and nuclear parks, so, her writing is “engaged writing” and while it is an artistic journey it is also a spiritual one. She moves from solipsistic spirituality to a plane of human welfare. And real spirituality is a feeling for one’s fellow men. Her didactic role comes out of a social conscience. In her essay on “Consultation on “Faith that Works” published by the Association of Religion and Intellectual Life published in 1990 she says “Humanitarian politics came into my life early” (*Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* 262). She has seen her father, mother and sister on soapboxes protesting against prevailing

injustices. Speaking at the Paul Zweig Memorial Lecture at Poets' House in 1991

Levertov says:

Being the child of a socially conscious family, conscience and circumstance virtually forced me into the politics of the anti-war movement of the 1960s and on into the broader anti-nuclear, environmental, and social justice concerns which evolved from it, so that I found myself frequently acting as apologist for "engaged" writing in response to external demands as well as (initially) to explain to myself what I was doing. (*Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* 4)

This new stance of Levertov, which concretized from the 60s, on her arrival in the U.S. is a result of her ethnic background which is Hasidistic and communitarian.

The American Christians as perceived by Levertov are a far cry from being Christ like. They are virtually practitioners of mainstream ethnocentrism with a backing of Calvinistic work ethics, where the so-called sacredness of the earth is the least priority. So she reasserts her Hasidic side, where she sees the sacred even in the secular. According to Hasidism, "Man is (in Emerson's words) a center for nature running out threads of relation through everything" (qtd in Gelpi, *Selected Criticism* 263). Even as man continues to take everything from Nature he owes something in return which is in Hasidic terms respect to life and treating everything secular as sacred. According to eco-theology respecting nature is respecting God. God has created the earth; man must cooperate with God to preserve it.

Levertov's poetry is a poetry of discovery – a discovery of self and the world.

Harry Marten in *Understanding Denise Levertov* says:

Virtually from its beginnings, Levertov's has been an art of community, of relationships both inside and outside of the poem. Her verses are both impassioned and scrupulously controlled, neither simply exploring nor eschewing self, but uncovering and making known the relationship of self to the world. (5)

Levertov advocates an ecological philosophy which evolves in her works as part of her hybrid belief system. Her relationship to the world is unveiled in her fervent desire to preserve the environment and her convictions of nature being a manifestation of God. Levertov passes through many stages of spirituality when one stage is found lacking she moves onto the next. And finally she stands on terra firma, takes up the problems of the day with a lot of social commitment. So from solipsistic spirituality she moves on to the plane of human welfare and concern.

Levertov knew that religious matters couldn't be separate from man's welfare and happiness. She does not approve of man's pursuit of power and money. She is certain that man will come back to nature one day. Speaking on poetry, women and war for a weekly taped (NBC) television program, included in *Poet in the World* she says:

I and most of my fellow American poets nowadays find ourselves inevitably – of necessity – writing more and more poems of grief, of rage, concerning the despoilment of the earth and of all life upon it, of the systematic destruction of all that we feel passionate love for, both by the greed of the industry and by the mass murder we call war. (123)

It is understood that the link of God, nature and man must never break, since real happiness lies in experiencing nature through an inspiration from God. Levertov can steel herself from all the glitter of materialism because of her convictions.

Nature is a book written by God for man. When man turns his back to nature, failing to give it respect his downfall begins from then on. From a lecture given at Boston University in 1989 titled “Celebrating Peace” series like others she notices the “[. . .] degradation of the biosphere is the most devastating war of all. The threat of nuclear holocaust simply proposes a more sudden variation in a continuum of violence we are already engaged in. Oil spills are events in the ongoing war. Deforestation is a kind of protracted trench-warfare” (*Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* 165). That is why Levertov, on knowing this, advocates that man should consciously not break this chain. In the poem “Sojourns in the Parallel World” Levertov chides man for living a life parallel to that of Nature. She accuses man of being caught up in a world full of dreams and preoccupations and a rat race of materialism. But once one lets go of material pursuits then one returns to Nature like:

of fire to coal – then something tethered
in us, hobbled like donkey on it’s patch
of gnawed grass and thistles. breaks free.

No one discovers
just where we’ve been, when we’re caught up again
into our own sphere (where we must
return. indeed. to evolve our destinies)[. . .] (*Sands of the Well* 49)

Speaking on the preface of *To Stay Alive* Levertov says that she does not wish the urban garden to survive, since her eyes were opened “to the whole system of insane greed, of racism and imperialism, of which war is only the inevitable expression” (*Denise Levertov: Poems 1968-1972* 106). She knows that this kind of devastation harms our planet. And if one stood in space and watched the earth she says, “It should be visible that this bluegreen globe / suffers a canker which is devouring it” (*Life Around Us* 25). Man is the worm destroying the globe. Levertov describes man’s actions when looked at from space as described in “It Should Be Visible”:

flame and smoky smoulder – the Earth would seem
 a bitter pomander ball bristling with poison cloves.
 And each war fuelled with weapons: it should be visible
 that great sums of money have been exchanged,
 great profits made, workers gainfully employed
 to construct destruction, national economies distorted
 so that these fires, these wars, may burn
 and consume the joy of this one planet [. . .] (*Sands Of The Well* 56)

Levertov’s new ecological philosophy is that the Earth a creation of God is the centre of all things. Man plunders this gift of God. In “Urgent Whisper” Levertov describes the Earth personified as sick, whose “lungs are scarred from old fevers” in *The Life Around Us*:

It comes from the Earth herself, I tell you,
 Earth herself. I whisper
 because I’m ashamed. Isn’t the earth our mother?

Isn't it we who've brought
this terror upon her? (20)

She describes the feelings of the earth like a human who is ravaged, and whines and whimpers in pain. The balance is lost and the link is broken, when the earth is ravaged because even in the most commonplace things God manifests himself. If this single idea is understood and integrated it will change the outlook of the world. Levertov's religious views and ecological philosophy make her conscious of the spiritual unconsciousness of the people of the twentieth century.

The philosophy founded by Levertov stems from “[. . .] a sense of belonging to, rather than dominating, an ecosystem; and of the osmosis, the reciprocal nature, of the sustaining relationship between the parts of an ecosystem” (*Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* 152). And for happiness that link must endure. When that link is broken one finds retribution taking place and man unhappy. Eventually he returns to nature to see and hear God. Modernism and materialism have affected man's ability to really see and hear. Man is really walking away from real beauty on this earth. She uses nature to describe abstract feelings and the presence of the Almighty.

All along Levertov has been surrounded by the teachings and ideas of Martin Buber, a widely read theologian of the twentieth century who was an exponent of the I-Thou relationship in his book, *I and Thou* (1923). Buber was a Romantic, and a Traditionalist. His approach to doctrine and ritual is pragmatic and symbolist and experiential.

Buber's idea of I and It moving to I and Thou is the supreme relationship which teaches man that when man and God vibrate and speak at an equal level then through this

relationship God reveals himself in things around. Levertov says in *Poet in the World* that “[. . .]Hasidic lore tells us dwells (sic) in all created things [. . .] Only by the light and heat of these divine sparks can we see, can we feel, the extent of the human range. They bear witness to the *possibility* of ‘disinterest, freedom, and intensity’” (51-52). That is why Hasidim see the sacred in the secular, even in the meanest thing. In the poem “The Acolyte” Levertov looks at a womanly chore of bread baking as “bread that is more than bread” (*Candles in Babylon* 69). Rudolph L. Nelson says: “Denise Levertov probes beneath the threshold of the here and the now and finds the transcendent within the stuff of immediate experience” (235). She quotes Martin Buber in her essays *Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays*: “‘To produce is to draw forth, to invent is to find, to shape is to discover’” (245). This is what she does – she produces a hybrid identity drawing forth ethics from Hasidism and combining it with her Christian upbringing. She wants to bring about a change in America and in its relationship to other nations which stem from her own convictions in Hasidism.

Hasidism helps Levertov to revel and wonder at all things. This feeling of wonder, praise of life, marked by laughter makes the world a better place to live. The reason for Levertov’s positive thinking and her joy in life is clear from her statement in an interview to Walter Sutton 1965: “Hasidism has given me since childhood a sense of marvels, of wonder . . .” (qtd in Gelpi, *Selected Criticism* 262). The Hasidim lead an ascetic life but they recognize the joy of being in the physical world. They stress on ecstatic prayer, faith accompanied by song, storytelling, and dance. In the poem “In Obedience” which mourns the death of her father, Levertov says:

I dance

for joy, only for joy

while you lie dying, into whose eyes

[.....]

seldom with candid love. Let my dance

be mourning then [. . .] (*Denise Levertov Poems: 1940-1960*, 67-68)

This elegy bears a definite Hasidic influence. It is also a celebration of a Hasidic philosophy of life – dancing in mourning and joy. Hasidim dance the Hasidic dance of praise. Kenneth Rexroth says that this dancing is like nothing else in the world “ecstatic dancing of a peculiar nature” (87). While singing they do not use words but sing meaningless syllables. In order to praise God, one must enjoy life. But this is not the Hedonistic way of enjoying life. This is the joy felt when experiencing God’s love and mercy. Just like her Hasidic ancestors, the Jews who suddenly discover within themselves the desire and strength to sing and celebrate life in joy and sorrow, she too has learnt to marvel at life.

Truth for Levertov is always waiting to transfigure and illuminate the ordinary. It exemplifies Levertov’s preoccupation with the role of the physical world in the understanding of the spiritual world. The poem “Matins” presents a series of epiphanies, which ultimately exalts the recognition of truth. Celebration of the authentic can take place in such a common circumstance as “rising from the toilet seat” (*Denise Levertov Poems 1960-67*, 59).

Marvelous (sic) Truth, confront us

at every turn,

[.....]

Thrust close your smile

That we know you, terrible joy. (*Denise Levertov Poems: 1960-67* 62)

Normally a spiritualist renounces the world. Levertov's spirituality is different. She celebrates the world. The external reality is perceived as an effective instrument to discover the transcendental reality – the outer world leading to the inner world. The ordinariness of a humdrum life can become a treasure trove of insights as wielded in Levertov's spiritual poems. From the outward phenomenal world the poet moves in to her inner world where she finds the spirit of God residing. But in her perception of spirituality there is an outward flow again – towards suffering humanity, social calamities, resulting in humanistic concerns. Levertov's mode of celebration resembles the mysticism of the English poet William Blake. For Blake the external flow stopped with the inner. But Levertov stands apart from other poets like Blake. Her new philosophy of the outward-inward process is not complete. The second lap is the inward-outward which makes it complete. This new spirituality manifests itself even in protesting against nuclear tests.

Levertov's spiritual imagination gives her an otherness. So the ordinariness and the extra ordinariness of things internalize her world view. But there is no spirituality possible without the dual movement of outward-inward and inward-outward. The external world impacts the individual writer with positive and negative effects. But based on his/her spiritual perception the personal experiences are transcended at some point and they give way to wider perceptions and larger concerns. From the outward phenomenal world the poet moves into her inner world where she finds the spirit of God residing. But in her perception of spirituality there is an outward flow again – towards suffering

humanity, social calamities, resulting in humanistic concerns. In *Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* she says:

But we live in an unprecedented time, a time when as we all know the fate of the Earth itself lies in the balance as never before; when day by day powerful forces all over the globe are tipping that balance further toward extinction. And this country, the USA, is playing a major part in that suicidal and globicidal insanity. (149)

Levertov tries to reconcile pantheistic ideas with Christian belief system despite the contradiction. In Christianity there is the presence of a personal God. But Christianity propagates sacredness in life, and not in a stone or the inanimate. This is a Hasidic belief. Later Levertov connects this to the contemporary reality of nuclear degradation. And there is an outpouring of eco-poetry. Levertov integrates all outward happenings and internalizes them. Normally one finds an outward-inward flow in experiential knowledge. But Levertov because of her social conscience looks for ways and means to help society. She has to respond to the degradation of environment and nuclear programmes. So her inner self urges her on for the greater concern of the larger community which makes her Christian and unlike the war mongering mainstream Christians.

Levertov realizes that real spirituality is feeling for one's fellow men; and finally to an ecological philosophy. In this artistic and spiritual journey she struggles to reach a clear perspective. Her faith responds from an earthly garden to an Edenic, spiritual paradise and then on to an urban garden. This urban garden resonates her ecological philosophy. Her relationship to nature itself is not just joy in the beauties of nature but a sheer ecstasy of mystical revelations. This moves on and contrasts with the America she

depicts in her poems. The unworldly outer life she leads and the inward looking journey she celebrates is part of her strong convictions. The struggle is internal where she tries to integrate the ordinariness of things with its extraordinariness, and thus internalizes her worldview.

Levertov's creative powers are also influenced by her Hasidic and Christian heritage. In *Levertov: New and Selected Essays* she says that, "the imagination [. . .] is the perceptive organ through which it is possible [. . .] to experience God" (246). She has become "increasingly convinced that the exercise of the imagination moves one towards faith" (Marten 17). Levertov says:

In the matter of religion, however, I have moved in the last few years from a regretful skepticism which sought relief in some measure of pantheism (while it acknowledged both the ethical and emotional influence of my Jewish-Christian roots and early education) to a position of Christian belief. (*Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* 241)

From a quasi pantheist to a quasi Christian she becomes an ecological philosopher who does not believe in institutionalized Christian religion but in a Hasidic way of life, a calm, serene, faith where she finds herself in communion with objects that are in themselves signs of their own secret mystery. Diana Surman says that, "one's inner discoveries should move hand in hand with one's outer perceptions [. . .]" (60). Levertov, like a true Hasidim, experiences divinity in the mundane and natural life around. She highlights faith and spirituality amidst man's environmental suicide, war, and nuclear parks.

In Levertov's poetry the image of the garden is a dominant one. This garden impulse to come home is not lost in Levertov. Garden is a creative place and a psychological touchstone. Levertov herself says, "My poetry had been at a stand still, blocked by the idea that I ought to create [. . .] there began to work in me – to ferment – a sense of what I couldn't do and what I could do: of who I was" (*Light Up the Cave* 252-53). She speaks of a garden being a place for miracles and epiphanies and mysteries. One observes a slow development of image from an earthly garden to a spiritual paradise and eventually to an urban garden. She uses this image to educate America of racism and techno parks which she wants averted. Edward Zlotkowski in his essay "In the Garden: A place of Creation" says that, "the image of the garden both in a literal and in a more extended sense – grows into one of the most significant figures in Levertov's work. No other locale equals in its effective resonance or spiritual power" (qtd. in Gelpi, *Selected Criticism* 303-04). She takes a didactic role and as Frederick Eckman remarks her poetry is one of hope and not "a poetry of doom" (qtd. in Wagner 21). In her last two collections of poems she envisions an urban garden highlighting faith and spirituality amidst man's environmental suicide, war and nuclear parks.

As a part of her pilgrimage she is tested in the garden of life. And her faith in God is only deepened by Hasidic thoughts of finding the sacred in the secular. Levertov says in *Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays*: "What I might write five years from now could be as different from what I say now as that is from what I might have written five years ago, although the direction of my development has, I believe, been consistent" (240). As she matures as an artist this garden has a spiritual ring to it. In the collection *Breathing the Water* she celebrates man's relationship between the physical and the

spiritual, that is, “man’s creative relationship to nature, affirming a palpable connection between the physical and the spiritual” (Marten 19). It becomes a well-founded fact that although she embraces no specific religious doctrine or set of religious observance, a pronounced religious vision has obviously marked her poetry. But in her poems Jorie Graham attests “a deep spiritual longing” (*Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* 4) and she sees deep meaning in the non-human environment. Her relationship with nature is different from what others felt for nature. But she is different because she reflects on her response to what she sees as she sees it and not as what she feels after seeing it. So the poet is a translator, translating experience.

Wordsworth was also a pantheist initially. He delighted in the sights and sounds of nature, and experienced a spirit beyond it. Later Wordsworth shifted his faith to Christianity knowing the belief in pantheism would not hold. From pantheism Levertov moves to faith via Hasidism. Her poems can be categorized as eco-poetry. And in the process of writing, she doubts, and her faith is tested over and over again. She finds pantheism shallow and is redeemed by Hasidism. She reaches there through faith, and her faith gets deepened by Hasidic thoughts of finding the sacred in the secular.

Pantheism was, for Levertov, a springboard to Christianity. Levertov says “Later, that unknown began to be defined for me as God, and further as God revealed in the Incarnation” (*Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* 241). She says, “We live in terror / of what we do not know” (*Candles in Babylon* 108). From writing out of a social conscience she reveals her agnosticism and turmoil of several cultural and social values.

Levertov is convinced that it is through intuition that people try to realise God’s presence in their life. That only God can give people the grace to see Him and feel His

love, as manifested in the physical world. Levertov feels simultaneously nurtured as a Christian and influenced by her Jewish roots.

Levertov shows how in modern times faith amidst science and technology can still anchor one firmly. Levertov in *Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays* says “And we perceive that our degradation of the biosphere is the most devastating war of all” (165), and instead of being progressive man tends to become regressive. Her spirituality enkindles in her a global denunciation of war, nuclear parks and racism, and a desire for an environment of natural beauty, fellowship and mutual respect and tolerance.

Her ecological concerns show that she loves and worries about people. She voices her desire for a just and compassionate society. She says:

I have been engaging then, during the last few years, in my own version of the Pascalian wager, and finding that an avowal of Christian faith is not incompatible with my aesthetic nor with my political stance, since as an artist I was already in the service of the transcendent, and since Christian ethics (however betrayed in past and present history) uphold the same values I seek in a politics of racial and economic justice and non violence.

(Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays 243)

Levertov is troubled by the feeling that there is a growing violence in the world and that man suffers and God does not intervene. But her poetry helps her to come to a theological explanation. God has given man volitional wings to transcend the human limitations and to do godly things with iron determination. But man refuses to see beyond the ordinary; so his wings drag on heavily behind him. The poem “Standoff” articulates this idea. She says:

Assail God's hearing with gull-screech knife blades.

Cozen the saints to plead our cause, claiming

grace abounding.

God crucified on the resolve not to displume [. . .]

(Breathing the Water 67)

If God took away that free choice from man the idea that God is love would be violated. These images emerge from her writing from time to time. Levertov says in *Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays*: "That imagination of faith acts as yeast in my life as a writer: in that sense I do experience 'faith that works' as well as 'work that enfaiths'" (257). Through the process of writing of the free choice given by God she acknowledges the supreme act of God's infinite love which is redemptive. In the *Michigan Quarterly Review* speaking to Lorrie Smith she says that "I now define myself as a Christian but not a very orthodox one, and I think that there is a way of looking at Christian faith as involving the co-operation of man. I think that is part of the meaning of the Incarnation" ("Interview" 603).

Levertov is an immigrant who resorts to melting down and becoming American. But her cultural frustrations and American Christianity would not permit this. So she decides to remain bicultural. She is motivated by her Christian upbringing and her father's Jewishness. In *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Women Poets* speaking to Jeni Couzyn in 1984 Levertov says:

My father's Hasidic ancestry, his being steeped in Jewish and Christian scholarship and mysticism, his fervour and eloquence as a preacher, were factors built into my cells [. . .] Similarly, my mother's Welsh intensity

and lyric feeling for Nature were not just the air I breathed but, surely,
were in the body I breathed with.

(Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays 258)

The beliefs she inherited from her parents stand her in good stead in generating her own values from her life and experiences. She confesses that she has deep roots in the culture and experiences that she obtained as a child. The Jewish woman plays a secondary role like in most patriarchies. But Levertov did not live in a typical Jewish patriarchy and hence her difference.

From her “Illustrious Ancestors” she has learnt the need for direction, perseverance and sensitivity. She knows that the practical can also be spiritual. She speaks with great pride of her “Illustrious Ancestors”:

The Rav
of Northern White Russia declined,
in his youth to learn the
language of birds, because
the extraneous did not interest him; nevertheless
when he grew old it was found
he understood them anyway, having
listened well, and as it is said, ‘prayed
with the bench and the floor.’ [. . .]

(Collected Earlier Poems: 1940-1960 77)

She tells John Atchity Kenneth in “An Interview with Denise Levertov”, “I have deep roots in the culture and experiences that I obtained as a child” (Marten 25). Writing

about her illustrious ancestor, a distinguished Hasidic Rabbi, Levertov uncovers her link to a creative line, which both explains and confirms her own developing creative tendencies. She says that amidst chaos there is an essential order linking all experiences. Levertov is mystical because of her ancestors; she writes from what is at hand in her daily experiences, the influence of her parents, the atmosphere she grew up in and the influence of Hasidism (her sense of joy and wonder). Everyday reality teaches her truth in the immediate.

Levertov is proud of her own belief in God's grace as revealed in The Incarnation of Christ for mankind which came in conflict with American Christianity. After becoming overtly Christian she makes special references to the New Testament. From here there is a relative decline or loss of faith in institutionalized religion and a moving over to a Hasidic way of life, which is calm, serene, and of faith. She finds herself in communion with objects which are in themselves signs of their own mystery. This shines by contrast with the American style of Christian belief which is secular, and without the sacredness reckoned as in Hasidism.

The vocation of a poet is to bring about social change. Levertov herself says in *Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays*:

A poetry articulating the dreads and horrors of our time is necessary in order to make readers understand what is happening, really understand it, not just know *about* it but feel it: and should be accompanied by a willingness on the part of those who write it to take additional action towards stopping the great miseries which they record. (146)

Professor Gelpi reiterates this same idea in an email to the author remarking that, “Levertov's Jewish-Christian background made her religiously incarnationalist and politically communitarian and socialist. Communitarian is the opposite of individualist. It assumes a just and compassionate society for all. Christian morality is based on the notion of the individual in a community of other individuals” (8 June 2005). And through this relationship the human being gains revelation or the knowledge of God’s will. She makes use of Christian images and myths to communicate a combination of Christian Incarnation and Hasidic faith. She uses Biblical characters to illustrate that ordinary men and women transcend the ordinary to attain spiritual heights. In “Translucence” in *This Great Unknowing* she describes how Lazarus was brought back to life:

a Lazarus, but a Lazarus (man or woman)
 without the memory of tomb or of any
 swaddling bands except perhaps
 The comforting ones of their first
 infant hours, the warm receiving-blanket . . . (48)

The shroud in which his body was wrapped appeared to him as the swaddling clothes of an infant. A second lease of life is a new birth hence swaddling clothes. This is the redemptive power of God and out of the shroud he makes swaddling clothes. Levertov implies, through Christian images, that man forgets the sacredness of experience when he emerges out of it.

Levertov discovers God through the journey of the soul. Her poetry is a record of this spiritual quest. She uses the art itself of the poet in understanding divinity. In 1967 writing for a symposium on the question “Is there a Purely Literary Study?” in *Poet in the*

World she says: “The interaction of life on art and of art on life is continuous” (112).

Dynamism is spiritually marked by growth and development. Radical changes from one to another are seen. Levertov’s is a new kind of spirituality speaking against nuclear parks. And her statements are connected to contemporaneity. Levertov’s main concern is the welfare of mankind. The humanist in her does not fail to perceive man’s future. And the fear of suffering humanity makes her caution man in his attempt to go nuclear.

Levertov’s perception of the garden image, a very generic one, changes. What emerges is that the real tussle is between Christian belief systems and Hasidic belief systems. She outlives many of the earlier stages, and that makes for growth. Levertov dies a Catholic. In another email to the author Prof Gelpi remarks: “She returned to the Christian faith and became a Roman Catholic in the 1980s and was a practicing Catholic for the last years of her life” (12 May 2005). He has also mentioned in his introduction to *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov* that “[. . .] she looks back to describe how she had come [. . .] in a reaffirmation of Christian belief and practice, which led to her reception into the Catholic church” (Gelpi, Introduction: “The Aesthetic Ethics” xvii). One notices that she is willing to learn grow and change. Spirituality is often the dead wood of faith. But one can see that Levertov’s spirituality is dynamic because it is still growing.

For hybrids the shifting of invisible/visible boundaries is a constant experience. Since an invisible boundary separates the mainstream from minority groups, it makes it possible for the ethnic minority who has been marginalized to carve a more profound vision and a higher destiny. For Levertov, coming to America only strengthens her faith in the idea of the incarnation in Christianity, which is nurtured by her Jewish ethos.

Native Indian Paula Gunn Allen's world view is that of Christian and Native American beliefs but she leans more heavily on Laguna beliefs. Christian patriarchy is limiting, and supports patriarchal domination, and projects a laddered relationship between man and woman. Allen believes in the Catholic fatherhood of God, but for Allen the link between man, God and nature forms a sacred hoop, which is the central idea of her belief system. The Indian sense of space relationships is different from that of the West. The one sees space as essentially circular or spherical in nature, while the other views space (and thus all relationships within that space) as laddered. Allen says in *The Sacred Hoop*:

The circular concept requires all "points" that make up the sphere of being to have a significant identity and function, while the linear model assumes that some "points" are more significant than others. (59)

According to Allen the sacred hoop also refers to the medicine wheel. In the case of Allen the formation of the hybrid identity can be seen as an adulteration of her Native Indian beliefs with American Christian beliefs. On surviving in a multicultural America, she confronts experiences which are incongruent with her Native American beliefs. Allen wades through contradictions of multi-culture. She says that she, "a Native American-cum-Christian," (*Off the Reservation* 91) cannot forget her heavy socio-cultural and religious heritage. For survival in the new environment, she modifies her belief system by adding elements from Native American culture, Lebanese Catholicism and American Puritanism. She takes great pride in her heritage. And though she straddles many cultures, her belief system is mainly Laguna. In an interview when asked "what makes an Indian?" Allen answers, "it's a turn of mind" (Ballinger and Swann 6). She says that she thinks

like a Laguna though she talks in English. Since Lagunas have a private space which is not consumable and inviolate, they are able to maintain their individuality. This reminds one of the words of Allen's mother to Allen:

She repeated her lesson, adding: there's a line all the Indian people have that no one can cross. Behind that line I keep everything that is mine, that is me. I don't let anyone cross that line [. . .] It is simply recognizing that one's self is inviolate; the private soul is private, not public.

(Off the Reservation 225)

Allen wishes to uncover the hypocrisy and deception involved in the white race's massive exploitation of the natives without the least trace of any justification. It is marked by the continual use of brutal force till the point of extermination. One unjust example of extermination of Native Americans she mentions; in the poem "Laguna's Ladies Luncheon Party" she remarks:

Gramma says it's so depressing –
all those Indian women,
their children never to be born
and they didn't know
they'd been sterilized.
[.]

A medical holocaust. *(Life Is a Fatal Disease 30)*

Many Native Americans died in the wars, diseases that the white man brought and because of the destruction of the food supplies on which Native American societies relied. As Joseph F. Healey says:

It is estimated that in 1492, there were anywhere from 1 million to more than 18 million Native Americans living in what became the continental United States. In 1890 when the Indian wars finally ended, the number of Native Americans had fallen to less than 250,000, a population decline of at least 75%. (74)

Here is the relevance of Allen's concept of spirituality. Spirituality may be redefined in terms of service to humanity by exposing the exploitation all around, by working with the marginalized people and for their lawful rights. Allen wishes to redeem her culture by using her writings as a means for the same. The invisibility and visibility of boundaries she wishes to throw light on to make mankind realize the callousness of the mainstream and the sufferings of Native Americans. As she says in the poem "Locus", "I know myself in terms of boundaries" (*Life Is a Fatal Disease* 142). Her half-breed or hybrid state has caused her several problems because of a lack of clear-cut boundaries. So she takes a stance to fight for herself and her less fortunate race. Native Indian culture is different from all non-native cultures including white American mainstream. After white mainstream conquest of Native Indians, freedom to practise certain rituals was not permitted. If practised they were ridiculed and denigrated. Tribal language and tribal religion were forbidden. This resulted in feelings of frustration and anger.

Unless one understands something of the culture of a people one cannot understand their literature. This is especially true of Native American culture. Allen wishes to preserve it because it is rich, and Americans wish to erase it thinking it inferior. Native Indian people are spiritual and practical, and Allen is the mouthpiece of her people. She says that according to Laguna people they emerge from the third world

“Sipapu” (underworld) into the fourth world. The major themes of Allen’s works are emergence, creation and migration. “This tradition migration (sic), is the strand I belong to;” (*Off the Reservation* 1). Allen makes the global readers aware of new insights into Indian culture which white mainstream has reduced to animism, primitivism and barbarism.

Allen subverts the notion of the primitive by shifting the label to White mainstream. The mainstream phallogocentric thinking is sick and must be healed. Allen says: “Indians are called primitive and savage not because they commit atrocities; [. . .] they place the good of the group and the good of the earth before that of the self” (*Off the Reservation* 29). Again the focus shifts on to community preference of the Lagunas and individualism of the mainstream. Since for the Lagunas tribal relationships are very important, the task of the individual is to contribute to the well being of the group and to keep the shifting balances in harmony whereas for white Americans the family or community is a bother or a hindrance in self-progress. Allen remarks: “They thought that the isolated self was the badge of strength and glory” (*Off the Reservation* 34). Even the earth is looked on with a utilitarian attitude.

Deeply embedded in Western thinking is the feeling that spirituality is patriarchal. All authority stems from a hierarchical arrangement which could be God or patriarchy. This affects not only women, but also anyone inferior in a social system. The diehard belief is that any concept of the sacred feminine belies the essence of true spirituality, which is, a masculinist, monotheistic and hierarchical privilege. Allen says: “Because men are extended the privilege of status, they rule ‘as gods’ over the women in their households, if not in their provinces and notion” (*Off the Reservation* 75). In traditional

patriarchy (as seen in *The Old Testament*) female power is subdued. It gives orders to women but does not take orders from women or generally speaking, is not willing to view women at par with them. The mainstream patriarchy is unaware of the trauma of coerced results. So pro-woman supporters feel this is the reason for the existence of problems. So they feel that if female powers are reinstated problems will be less since attitudes emerge from the focus on respect of genders. Allen says:

At Laguna Pueblo, gods really are female. I should say that the major deities are female, because the traditional Laguna people aren't monotheistic or exclusivist in any way. The system was traditionally female-centered, as reflected in its matrilineal, matrilocal, and matrifocal structures (if such ungainly Westernized concepts can be said to reflect Laguna systems with any accuracy). Women enjoyed (and to an extent greater than their sisters in the larger community surrounding the Pueblo) positions of respect and authority in a variety of venues, being largely responsible for the economic, political, social, and spiritual functioning of the community as a whole. (*Off the Reservation* 79-80)

Like Levertov, Kingston, and Giovanni, Allen also creates a psycho-social-moral forum where she enters a period of suspension between her abandoned past cultural life and the new roles of her profession in the American soil. As Allen in her interview to Joseph Bruchac says:

Where Cubero is, is between civilization and wilderness: and the choice for me is: Which way do I go? The resolution for me is that I don't take either choice. I stay in the middle of both. I tend to value wilderness as an

aesthetic and moral and personal value over civilization, though I can see civilization in terms of the wilderness, rather than the other way around.

(7)

Wilderness or Indianness is in her blood, and this is the foundation for Allen's spirituality. Allen says in the Preface to *Grandmother's of the Light* that, "[. . .] the spirits, the super-naturals, goddesses, gods and holy people still have a hand in human affairs" (xvii).

Allen has undergone the process of regeneration as a person and as a poet. Regeneration, in the case of Allen, also means a rebirth from Christianity to animism. According to Allen the Native American world view is more dynamic than the Western world view which is static. The reflection of this stance is seen in the Christian attitude that man can be saved only by a saviour and that once one is a saint one will always remain a saint. Allen says in *The Sacred Hoop*:

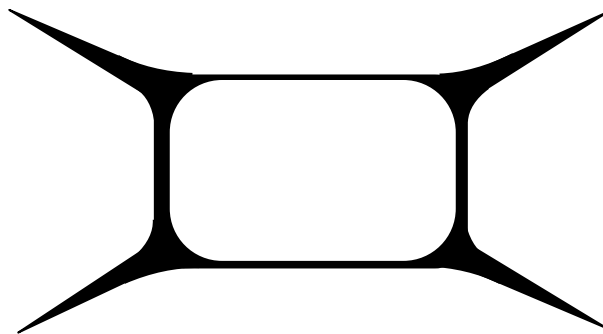
Christians believe that God is separate from humanity and does as he wishes without the creative assistance of any of his creatures, while the non-Christian tribal person assumes a place in creation that is dynamic, creative, and responsive. Further, tribal people allow all animals, vegetables and minerals (the entire biota in short), the same or even greater privileges than humans. (56-57)

The Indian universe is based on self-esteem and the Christian's is based on futility and sinfulness. When you move from innocence to experience it is not just a linear growth. It is also a clash of belief systems and conflicts. Regarding Red Indians and Africans there is a move from paganism of the past to Christianity. Allen says: "The lessons of the

church are that everybody I love is a murderous, vicious, guilty creature, including myself. The only good person was killed and we killed him” (Bruchac 7). In *Survival This Way* she tells Bruchac: “I’m a very religious person. I always have been. Catholicism is very important to me because I’m a religious person. It was the politics of the Church that I couldn’t abide . . . and their incredible stupidity about human beings. . .” (17). Allen sees God in all things in the Universe but unlike Christianity she does not believe that man is superior to all creation. According to Laguna belief man is only another link in the mystery of creation.

Seeing the Indian tradition fitting well into the worldwide traditions she invents new ways of thinking that destabilize the networks of classification. For her, there is a strong link between man, God and nature. She doesn’t adhere to the Animism of the traditional Native Indians but brings in American Christianity. According to *The Oxford Dictionary* animism is “the attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena. 2. belief in a supernatural power that organizes and animates the material universe” (“animism”). According to Native Indians, there is a spirit behind everything in nature and traditional Native Americans worship these spirits. The Red Indians believe in the spirits of this world and the spirits of the dead. It is only with the invasion of White men that a new world view which separates spirit and body emerges. In Laguna belief system God is called All Spirit or Great Spirit. Allen says: “Where I come from, God is a woman, her name is Thinking” (*Off the Reservation* 89). She is accompanied by her sister goddess – Memory or Intuition. She is called grandmother and also spider. According to Laguna paradigm, sisters share motherhood. Accordingly the mother or her sisters bring up the child. The Great Spirit pours a great deal of force

“umane” into all things, even into things like pebbles, ants and whirlwinds. That is why it is regarded as sacred and to be given respect. According to Native Indian spirituality everything and everyday is sacred. From the Western point of view there is a clear division between mind and matter/material, between the spirit and the body. And Allen says: “But to tribal traditionals such divisions do not exist, [. . .] Nor is there a clear line between sacred and secular for tribal traditionals” (*Off the Reservation* 44-45). According to Native American belief nothing can be underestimated because it is non-human. The word “umane” does not just represent power, it is power. “Sacred”, “power” and “medicine” are related terms. Having this power means being able to use this extra force without being harmed by it. And medicine means a personally owned force. The number four is regarded as sacred or most “wakan” to Native Indians. Four stands for “Tatuye Tope” - the four quarters of the Earth. And one of its chief symbols is “umane” as seen in the figure below:



Allen’s Christian upbringing is often reflected in her writings. She makes use of Christian metaphors, images and the Christian idea of suffering all resulting from her Catholic schooling. All these facts explain her partial ethnic background. Her father

happens to be a Lebanese Catholic and her maternal grandfather a Scot. Allen grew up on the Cubero Land Grant, in New Mexico. She says:

I grew up in the hollow of the land, a hollow that was filled with grass and flowers, à la the white eyes, planted and nurtured by my half-breed grandmother, a hollow that was heavy with trees with wilderness.

(Off the Reservation 182)

The hollow that Allen speaks of has a double implication. It refers to the shady, cool and good spot she lived and also to the Christian metaphor of living in the hollow of God's hand. Bruchac quotes Allen, "I lived literally in a hollow [. . .] it's like the hollow of a hand – and that's a Christian metaphor" (4). This Christian metaphor implies the human race is precious to God. Yet in her there is a moving back and forth between a Christian awareness and a more Indian sense of land and place. Despite all these her primary affiliation to Native American race remains intact as evidenced in her writings. This is mostly because she finds her ethnicity to be of great value and significance to her. Moreover the situation is corroborated by the fact that the foreigners came to the American continent with wrong purposes, and used brutal methods for annihilating the Natives for no fault of theirs.

Allen speaks of the female journey to spiritual transcendence. She finds it difficult to reconcile what the church taught her, what she experiences and what her mother taught her, namely, that reality is the most important of all things around. The first reality she became aware of is the injustice of inequality and disrespect. Allen says:

You treat people as though they are real, even little tiny people. You don't trivialize them and act like they're idiots. Instead you treat them as though

they are perfectly intelligent beings. You remember that your mind is inviolably yours, that no one can have it, ever. So you act this way or that way, depending on what they want from you because that is not what is important. What is important is that they can't change your mind, which is a very Laguna thing. (Bruchac 5)

Ethnic identities disapprove of mainstream American ethnocentrism, which is basically Eurocentric. The mainstream American culture highlights Christian values which are permeated by the liberating grace of suffering. According to this the first becomes last and the last becomes first. This idea of suffering that comes from Christianity makes Native Americans realize that in the eyes of God all are equal. All along the mainstream makes the immigrant or the ethnic identity to feel 'the other' and now it dawns that unless he gives permission it cannot be so; for God does not discriminate as man does.

For Allen the natural world shows something of the human world. For her the landscape is a place where the great dramas are enacted. All things are related to the universe, and are one family. Man is a part of a living whole. But according to Western thinking the world is divided into natural and supernatural. Speaking about *The Woman who Owned the Shadows* Annette Van Dyke in her essay "The Journey Back to the Female Roots: A Laguna Pueblo model" says:

The pueblo worldview, like that of the other tribal cultures, is based on the concept that all things inanimate and animate are related and are part of the whole. Plants, animals, rocks and people are in reciprocal relationship, and people must carry on rituals, prayers and offerings to keep things in

balance in that reciprocal relationship. To the pueblo, who have kept their world view essentially intact, life is sacred and everything including the arts contributes to “light, life, well being”. (28)

In the Native Indian belief system relationship is central. All are brothers and relatives of one part of an orderly and balanced whole. Afraid of the American corrupting influence Allen’s mother taught her to respect all that is in nature, the flora and the fauna. “When I was small my mother often told me that animals, insects, and plants are to be treated with the kind of respect one customarily accords to high-status adults. ‘Life is a circle, and everything has its place in it’” (*The Sacred Hoop* 1). This idea is an integral part of her life. She says that a bull snake lived under her house and Lagunas never killed bull snakes. Bruchac quotes Allen “You take care of people and you take care of creatures because that’s what you do and you don’t do anything else” (5). But the Euro-American world view is one that separates the animate from the inanimate, man from animals, and shows lack of respect to other creations. They do not see the interrelatedness of all things in a web of being. The world’s view of man above plants and animals, and mind over the physical, leads ultimately to a lack of balance. Trees and mesas are important. Conversations are with animals. As she loves her tribe all relationships are important. Allen says in *The Sacred Hoop*: “The American Indian sees all creatures as relatives (and in tribal systems relationship is central), as offspring of the Great Mystery, as cocreators (sic), as children of our mother, and as necessary parts of an ordered, balanced, and living whole” (59). The Indian feels that being away from his tribe he cannot progress. Allen reiterates this same point: “I have a strong sense of family, of

property, of place” (*Off the Reservation* 210). But according to Western thinking in this system man occupies a rung on the hierarchical ladder higher than nature.

Speaking about the Native Indian life Allen takes into consideration the totality of the experiences of all the tribal groups coming under the umbrella concept of Pan Indian civilization. Since Allen says:

American Indian spiritual traditions are as varied as the lands they live on, as varied as the tribes are from one another, and as multitudinous as the spiritual disciplines practiced by various spiritual societies within each tribe. (*Off the Reservation* 40)

Allen makes a few generalizations of Native Indian spirituality and mysticism. From the Western point of view, “these states are uncommon, eerie, superlatively extraordinary, and characterized by abnormal states of unconsciousness” (*Off the Reservation* 44). She reflects American Indian spiritual practices within the context of world spiritual traditions. Being aware of the inter-penetration between Native Indian and the mainstream American culture her hybridity takes on extra significance and growing depth which stands her in good stead while speaking in the new voice.

After observing Allen’s writing one notices that once one finds a culture inadequate, one looks for another culture. After Allen’s cultural encounter involving mainstream monolithic American life she feels a sense of inadequacy, and also feels cheated in terms of the hypocritical components of that culture. Very naturally and subsequently she is driven to her Laguna roots which does not have deception, hypocrisy and double talk like the gun in one hand and peace preaching on the other, of the American mainstream.

There is a feeling that women's spirituality or gendered spirituality excludes males. Some even believe it is a part of male spirituality. Native American spirituality is goddess centered unlike white mainstream Christianity. It is from this third space that Allen makes a resurgence of the goddess centered spirituality. Allen says:

Essentially a woman's spiritual way is dependent on the kind of power she possesses, the kind of Spirit to whom she is attached, and the tribe to which she belongs. She is required to follow the lead of spirits and to carry out the tasks they assign her. (*The Sacred Hoop* 257)

Allen says that "For tribal peoples, spirituality and mysticism are communitarian realities. The community and every individual within it must ever be mindful of the human obligation to spirit, balance, and the relationship (or kinship) that exists among all beings, so that all might prosper" (*Off the Reservation* 47). That is why white mainstream has represented Indians as wilderness. Allen says: "We stay connected if *once* in our lives, we learn exactly what that connection is between our heart, our womb, our mind, and wilderness. And when each of us has her wilderness within her, we can be together in a balanced kind of way" (*Off the Reservation* 61). Allen says that "Enwholment" is experienced only when they learn to see and respect things in their own perspectives, which is a sacred circle. The ultimate expression of this lack of balance is the development and use of atomic bomb, which another Laguna writer Leslie Silko documents in her novel *Ceremony*. Like her Allen too feels that the balance between nature, plants and animals is to be realised as important if major catastrophes are to be avoided. Lagunas believe that because the Anglos do not think good thoughts their lands experience drought. The pride they have in their individualism is causing harm to the

planet. Hence Lagunas believe that individualism and suspicion all drive away “Shiwana”, the rain people “who bring rain only when we ‘think good thoughts’ and keep peaceful in our hearts” (*Off the Reservation* 112). For Allen the shadows signify death but they also symbolize rains which stand for rebirth, new life. In her interview to Joseph Bruchac in March 1983 about people from the valley of death “Where I come from the land of the dead isn’t a terrible place, it’s where the rain comes from. Rain clouds, oh the shadows they make are not to be believed. And they are the people coming back to bring the rain” (Bruchac 10).

Native Americans believe in transformation or mutation. Change and transformation preoccupy Allen’s writings. People can transform themselves into bears and birds. The natives have a ceremonial understanding called ritual, which means “to change something or someone from one state or condition to another” (*Off the Reservation* 116). This is in physical terms. It is like water being poured into cups, and it in turn, turns to wine. Sometimes it is a total transformation in which the old form dies. Transformation does not take place in the mood of the person alone nor is it always a linear process. It is a dramatic shift. Allen’s writing is about what it means to retain a traditional identity, in spite of change.

Cultural encounters make Allen generate her ideas based on her beliefs. These thoughts are new and for Allen it is an assertion with confidence of Laguna gynosophies. Lagunas believe the planet earth is a physical being which is emotional, spiritual and mental. She is a mother and a grandmother. The reason for the planet being in a crisis is not just the deeds of men but because Allen says:

[. . .] she is entering upon a great initiation – she is becoming someone else. Our planet, my darling, is gone coyote, *heyoka*, and it is our great honour to attend her passage rites. She is giving birth to her new consciousness of herself and her relationship to the other vast intelligences, other holy beings in her universe. Her travail is not easy
[. . .] (*Off the Reservation* 120)

Allen believes that man is a part of the Earth, so we are her relatives. Even the Earth does not want to change, like humans she prefers to be the same. But like a woman changes from a mother to a grandmother she has to transform herself. She says: “We are not her, but we take our being from her, and in her being we have being, as in her life we have life. As she is, so are we” (*Off the Reservation* 120). This is not because of industrialization, war or exploitation of the earth. She does not wish to be caught in flux of transition but longs to reach the completed stage. The transitory stage is marked by volcanic passions and storms and earthquakes. Only on complete transformation the experience of a congruent self, with the spirit and with the earth, is experienced. This essential balance is a part of Laguna belief system. One sees this as a great honour to humanity, for one is attending her passage rites. Allen explains how by doing this she is giving birth to a new consciousness of her self and her relationship to other things in the universe.

It is accepted among Lagunas that some Native Indian women have healing powers. The bear is seen by them as healer. This proceeds from the knowledge of the Bear people who are mostly vegetarians and have healing powers. Allen claims that it is because Americans eat a lot of non-vegetarian food that they are so violent. Allen says,

“[. . .] vegetarianism doesn't create a tendency towards violence [. . .]” (*Off the Reservation* 91). Allen tries to preserve her Laguna belief system, which she holds dear.

Allen says in “The Trick Consciousness”:

So complete – I have changed nothing.

The key is in remembering, in what is chosen for the dream.

In the silence of recovery we hold

the rituals of the dawn,

now as then. (*Life Is a Fatal Disease* 181-182)

Allen admires many Christian values and modes of behaviour but not everything. Simultaneously, she holds Laguna culture dear. Blending both these together she formulates her world view which is marked by hybridity. Allen translates her life into words, and enacts new forms of identity that blur the boundaries between apparently distinct people. This process of cultural accommodation seems to be on the increase in multicultural societies as reflected in Allen's writings spread over thirty years.

Being a multicultural entity, Allen takes the stance of a new spirituality which emerges from her varied backgrounds of being a Christian and an Indian. She internalizes this, and after much battle within, opts to assert and preserve her Indian heritage.

Kingston grew up in a china town with a Chinese belief system. This comprises precepts from Confucianism and Buddhism. This can be illustrated by Kingston who mentions in *The Woman Warrior*: “‘Chinese smeared bad daughters-in-law with honey and tied them up naked on top of ant nests’, my father said. ‘A husband may kill a wife who disobeys him. Confucius said that. Confucius, the rational man’” (*Woman Warrior* 193). “It was bad luck even to walk under women's pants on clothesline” (*China Men*

52). According to Chinese tradition the senior members of the family or “the powerful older people made wrong doers eat alone” (*Woman Warrior* 7). Statements like this only indicate the values upheld and the position of women in pre-Revolutionary Chinese society. This only reveals why Kingston was influenced more by Buddhism than Confucianism.

According to Buddhism, there are three periods of salvation and in the third period Jesus is regarded as a Buddha and the true Son of God, emerging directly from God. Both Buddha and Confucius acknowledged the coming of the Son of God more powerful than them. Here one notices the link between Christianity and Buddhism.

Kingston is influenced by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thicht Nhat Hanh who advocates the five wonderful precepts which are the moral foundation of Buddhism. “Having ethics, even intentions and aspirations, turns you in the right direction, towards some lasting idea about good. I am a manifestation of Idea, food that makes blood, bones, muscles, body, self. I stood alive in the fire and felt ideas pour into me” (*Fifth Book* 13). The Idea that poured into her is to advocate peace for a world community. Only a person who has suffered devastation can talk of peace. She believes in the teachings of Thicht Nhat Hanh because it is a socially engaged Buddhism unlike the general Buddhism for everyday living. He is a social activist who interrogates the minute everyday life events.

Today American society is split into those who advocate war and those who are anti-war. And what draws American people to other movements and religions like this is that they break the usual framework of protest. So the Chinese, being followers of Confucianism, Caodaism and Buddhism, do not have any strongly institutionalized religion as such. But they are ritualistic in some aspects of life as in preparing certain

special delicacies and types of food, quoting popular proverbs and sayings, talk stories, and maintaining family ties and strong bonds. She falls back on the rich myths, proverbs, ethics and food habits of the Chinese. She is judiciously selective in imbibing the tenets of religious experiences. She gladly accepts the Buddhist value system where gender equality is implicit. She has no problem accepting the Vietnamese peace mission based on Coadaim. But on the other hand she has strong reservations about the principles of Confucius quietly accepted by the Chinese. It is primarily because she finds many Confucian ideas to be male oriented, patriarchal and thus handicapping and even crippling to women. For these valid reasons she formulates a life view of her own, and articulates it in a new voice.

Kingston advocates a world nation giving the Chinese due recognition. She speaks against American racism and war policies. All throughout *Tripmaster Monkey*, a lot of race jokes are mentioned. “A lot of people warm up meetings with race and sex jokes” (*Tripmaster Monkey* 60). This only indicates how racism is the central theme that is uppermost in Kingston’s mind as she is looking for ways to end this or to retaliate to this unjust mainstream preoccupation.

The mainstream made the religious practices of the Chinese appear secondary. In *China Men* Kingston describes how, as a child, she attended school during the Korean War. She mentions how then, she wore a dog tag in case she was abandoned because of bombing for easy identification. On filling the details in a form she asks her mother what religion she is. Being exposed to American Christianity the daughter is confused about her own religion:

I looked up “religion” in the *American-Chinese Dictionary* and asked my mother what religion we were. “Our religion is Chinese,” she said. “But that’s not a religion,” I said. “Yes, it is,” she said. “We believe in the Chinese religion.” “Chinese is our race,” I said. “Well, tell the teacher demon its Kung Fu Tse, then,” she said. The kids at school said, “Are you Catholic?” “No.” “Then you’re a Protestant.” So our dog tags had *O* for religion and *O* for race because neither black nor white. Mine also had *O* for blood type. Some kids said *O* was for “Oriental”, but I knew it was for “Other” [. . .] (*China Men* 276)

Racial differences make Kingston aware that “*O*” implies “the other”. This is what people confront in the wake of leaving their own land. They experience cultural isolation and alienation.

Ursula King says, “Women have been traditionally peace-makers in the personal and private sphere, but today they have taken their peace-making capacity into the public domain by struggling and campaigning for peace and justice in an entirely new way” (90). This is evident in women’s deep involvement in the ecology and peace movement. American war policies make Kingston conclude that the only thing the mainstream does not understand is the need for peace. So Kingston decides to become vocal and raise American consciousness through experiences of war veterans of the Vietnam War, and through her own experiences.

Caodaism, a belief system of the Vietnamese, stresses on the need for peace. According to this belief one must not kill any living thing. One must not covet, to avoid falling into a trap of materialism and not yearn for high living. And the central point of

Caodaism that influenced Kingston is the belief that when “Nowadays all parts of the world are explored: people knowing each other better, aspire to a real peace” (*Fifth Book* 243). From Caodaism is borrowed terms like pope, cardinal etc. “The Outline of Caodaism” that was sent to Kingston by war veterans is:

Humanity lives in sufferings.

We suffer as a result of heart breaking ideological conflict; cruel wars, effete ethics. We suffer a terrible form of anguish with a mixture of inferiority complexes, moral sterility, and spiritual void. It is our duty, to seek, by all means, if not to end those suffering, at last, to relieve them.

(Fifth Book 243)

Kingston is committed to the cause of peace. Kingston says in spite of war being waged on them the Vietnamese loved peace, and were tolerant to difficulties and sufferings, which came with war. And Kingston says: “I am fascinated to know that islands of peace existed in war, and that American soldiers found them in Viet Nam” (*Fifth Book 244*).

Kingston’s outlook is marked by pacifism as contrasted with the militancy of the mainstream. The foundation of her philosophy of peace is solid and strong. It is the result of the personalized experience of the vagaries of war, and during the Vietnam War two of her brothers were in the American air force. She also has learnt of the Books of Peace in China that were lost. She herself experiences loss and destruction of her incomplete novel of 136 pages, which gets burnt in the Oakland Beverley fire of 1991. All this makes peace valuable to her and the need for the emergence of a new human being. Speaking to Blauvelt about migration she says “[. . .] here in the U.S., now everybody from all over

the world is here. We are going to form some kind of new human being out of all this” (qtd. in Skenazy 78). This new human being reflects her bicultural/multicultural stance to advocate her peace philosophy. She says:

[. . .] I said that Plum village was a successful experiment in international community. Crossing, erasing, broadening boundaries, people had come here from all over the world – the U.K., America, Japan, Viet Nam, Scandinavia, Italy, Germany, India, Russia [. . .] We were living in community, living in peace. (*Fifth Book* 389-90)

Kingston reveals the changes that have come upon her. She now wishes to belong to a community of people with like minds and a social commitment. So she promotes the idea of a global community advocating peace. “ ‘After all when I write I am discovering things’” (*Fifth Book* 62). Thicht Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist Vietnam monk, started the Plum village. It is a city of peace that has emerged from the Vietnam-American War. Kingston discovers and helps to build Plum Village – an experiment in international community and a product of the Vietnam-American war. Kingston describes how living here is living in trust, no one has greed, and nothing is kept under lock and key.

The essential value system of Kingston belongs to Chinese culture, which is wedded to peaceful coexistence, harmony, and mutual enrichment, as dictated by Confucianism and Buddhism. In contrast the American mainstream culture is built on the foundation of violence, power games and conquests of all kinds. Finding the mainstream culture and its war mongering, Kingston seeks and finds spiritual solace in the highly benign Chinese spirituality, which abhors violence of all kinds. Still, she is not averse to the beneficial aspects of the mainstream culture. Subsequently there is hybridization at

the level of the spiritual values, concepts and styles of behaviour. This is symptomatic of a general trend resulting from large-scale immigration and trans-cultural encounters.

It is the entertainment industry that represents any non Euro-American individual as a subject of interest and object to be looked over. But Levertov, Giovanni, Kingston and Allen have turned tables by making those that are projected as “the other” as a part of the American population. Kingston creates Wittman Ah Sing, a well-educated playwright with an undisciplined monkey brain depicted as an inferior man because of his race, is raised in the eyes of God. She combines tenets of the Eastern religion of Buddhism and Christianity. The principle that Christianity upholds is reiterated – the last shall be made first and the first last. Wittman like the Monkey King has a critical eye and is aware of the injustice done to his race. He has the ability to make the new race feel guilty for ill-treating him. This is similar to the Liberation Theology, and Humanism preached by Nikki Giovanni. When this is added to Christianity it gives rise to human theology, that is, Jesus liberating the downtrodden, the marginalized and the suffering masses. The spirituality of Giovanni centres on the idea that to be sufficiently human is divine enough. She says in “Gemini”:

I think we are all capable of tremendous beauty once we decide we are beautiful or of giving a lot of love once we understand love is possible, and making that world over in that image should we choose to. I really like to think a Black, beautiful, loving world is possible. I really do, I think. (*Prosaic*189)

In today’s dehumanizing social climate people speak more of what they are attached to – things, TV, films, dogs and cats since they have very little regard for human

life. Giovanni reflects this in the poem “Nothing Makes Sense”. She lays bare the oppressive conditions of contemporary existence. Giovanni says:

nothing is real especially
 tones i heard
 a rumbling and thought
 the world was coming
 to an end [. . .] (*Collected Poetry* 183)

Giovanni is reared as a Christian in the Baptist and Episcopal faith. But spirituality for Giovanni is not ritualistic, but works at the heart level where one cares and feels for individuals as human beings. This is like humanistic discourses where the reference to God is avoided, emphasizing only human nature. This is the ideology of modern humanism where one gives and takes respect. Giovanni’s fight is more aggressive having been deprived for long and having to fight for her own independence. Margaret B. McDowell says: “The fight in the world today is the fight to be an individual, the fight to live out your own damn ego in your own damn way. . . . If I allow you to be yourself and you allow me to be myself, then we can come together and build a strong union” (186). What Giovanni focuses on is more or less the liberation theology. Since humanness is absent in human interactions between the mainstream and the ethnic, Christ is perceived as having come to liberate the dispossessed, the deprived and the marginalized.

Giovanni does not accept the patriarchal system of life as presented in The Old Testament. Jehovah as he appears in The Old Testament seems to distance Himself from humanity. Giovanni questions this hierarchical structure of patriarchal power which goes

against all canons of Christian belief system where one is equal to everyone else despite the distinctions of colour, creed, ethnicity and so on. This hierarchy has influenced mainstream Christianity. Having witnessed suffering and marginalisation all around her she does not fall in love with this idea of Christianity. She sees hope in Jesus the Son of God who suffered like any human being and was treated most shabbily by the rest of mankind. Jesus is sent to deliver man from his sins. He was human yet divine. Giovanni's spiritual dynamics could be found to be selective in that it cannot totally accept the Old Testament for the reason mentioned above.

The belief system of Giovanni is far different from Levertov's pantheistic and Hasidic cry. Levertov's belief is witnessing God in all things around her and marvelling at this newfound joy. Giovanni believes, to be human is divine, and to care and feel for one's fellowmen is a sign of one's spirituality and one's close relationship to God. One knows that spirituality is termed as an ideal that reckons all reality in essence as spiritual. It helps one to transcend all barriers, and connects one with truth. The move is from self-love and self-gratification towards love of God and devotion to truth. And the truth is that everything is from God. So when the individual ascends this ordinary realization or truth he forms a bond with God, and loves and realizes the values of Truth. Descartes says, "No beauty is comparable to the beauty of truth" (Lavine 88). So the beauty that comes from the heart is love and feeling for one's fellowmen. Giovanni's grandparents had to shift their residence in old age to Linden Avenue. Giovanni loses her grandmother which she feels is because her grandmother felt dislocated and not at home in the new surrounding. Mozella G. Mitchell says of Giovanni: "No doubt, her sensitivity to the

reality of this situation aroused in Giovanni an awareness of the helplessness of other humans under similar social conditions [. . .] (138).

Giovanni has been brought up on purely American lines in terms of education, social behaviour etc. But experientially she gets victimised by the same belief system, which she cannot take lying down. Therefore she rebels against that, which is supposedly, based on Christian religion. She grew up amidst sexist and racist gibes. She dislikes her people for taking things lying down and for being pulled down by the terrible inferiority complex (that they are no match for the whites). She wanted Blacks to reorganize and assert themselves. Barbara Crosby in her Introduction to *The Prosaic Soul of Nikki Giovanni* says, “Nikki was also blessed with a spiritual/emotional nature reaching back to her African roots” (7). She writes artistically radical poems aimed at raising awareness of Black rights and promoting the struggle for racial equality. Despite being a hybrid, she highlights the valuable features of her own culture with a purpose of conscientising her own people.

American racism and marginalisation of Blacks is because of their physical attributes. Fighting a hostile environment, Giovanni knows that racism is at the core of American value system. She says, “The spirituals teach us that the problem of the twentieth century is not the problem of the color line. The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of civilizing white people” (*Racism 101* 56-57), since, the mainstream, by and large, expresses negative feelings towards minority groups in matters of rights, privileges, education, wages and mobility. Giovanni expresses: “Because the biggest stumbling block to progress in America is still racism” (*Prosaic* 511). Ethnic identities are dominated by the mainstream consciously forming two factions – the

marginalized and the mainstream. It is not the marginalized that created the split but the mainstream. Giovanni asserts that she does not wish to split the world at all. But if the mainstream does so, then she wishes Black Americans to emerge first. In “A Poetic Equation” she talks to Margaret Walker on how to save the African- American race that white America is trying to destroy:

I don't want to split the world, it's split already. And if that's the way it is, then I want my side to come out number one [. . .] I will tell you that I do believe that our common enemy is the white man in America and his culture, which are striving to destroy us and our culture. (5)

Giovanni begins to formulate a humanist world view and to see individuals, including herself, of course in terms of their places in the scheme of things. She tries to search for meaningful responses to situations. Her new aim in life is to relate her poetry to church music to bring about change. Many of her poems she recites to the music of gospel music in the background. “In a May 1972 article in *Jet*” she explains to Mozella G. Mitchell, “‘I wanted people to take not just my poetry but something I thought was a valid comment on my poetry which was gospel music’. Her desire to relate her poetry not to street music but to church music, she explained, was expressive of a new aim on her life, to get inside institutions and effect changes in and through them” (144).

Giovanni frowns on American Christianity because it does not result in teaching Americans to love Black people. She accepts the idea of the incarnation but not the Godhead of Christianity, which does very little good for women. Through suffering the exterior man dies and the inner man grows. Hers is a deep faith in the goodness of man, and the belief that all human beings are made of flesh and blood. Giovanni, as a Black

writer, feels that her community has suffered great anguish. And she reconciles herself to this suffering by saying that if a good man like Jesus can be crucified by the world then her community is certainly not that good. In an interview to Arlene Elder she says “. . . If we crucify Jesus, you know, whom we recognize in the Western world as being the Son of God, then you know we would shoot down everybody” (Interview 70). Giovanni knows God does not discriminate but man does. She is proud of being Black as she says in “Poem for Flora”:

how god was neither north
nor south east or west
with no colour but all
she remembered was that
Sheba was Black (sic) and comely
and she would think
i want to be
like that [. . .] (*Collected Poetry* 131)

God is just and does not show preference for colours. But Queen of Sheba was dark complexioned and Giovanni thinks her beautiful and wishes to be like her. Giovanni says in *The Prosaic Soul of Nikki Giovanni* “Beliefs generally come through training, and training is based on feeling” (48). So by expressing her thoughts through writing she brings about a change in Black peoples’ outlook.

Black Americans have never been guilty of attacking or erasing a community, but they have been victims of that. And their untold suffering has made them more tolerant, broader in world perspective and stronger to retaliate with determination and focus.

Giovanni articulates in a new voice her belief system. She says: “I would really feel badly if somebody said, ‘Well I read you in 69 and I’m glad to say, you haven’t changed’ That would ruin my day” (Giovanni and Tate 190). Literature and media communicate Black life and culture as trivial and marginal. After her first two volumes her perspectives changed as Amiri Baraka reflects on the writings of the writers that emerge from the Black Arts Movements as “an art that would actually reflect black life and its history and legacy of resistance and struggle” (*Collected Poetry* xx). Since existing models are demolished her voice of protest is new. She finds a purpose in writing since she wishes to reconstruct the essence of Black life. She longs to “conscientise” (Freire 15) people in the polemics of Black life and culture. This process of redemption is a long one. She directs attention to the inner grace of Blacks, their humanitarian life styles and their real survival of horrendous circumstances.

The life of writers of ethnic identity is a white martyrdom with no bloodshed. These ethnic identities have been scapegoats that have suffered on account of their colour, race, identity and physical features. Nikki Giovanni in “Poem” says:

we are all imprisoned *in the castle of our skins*
 and some of us have said so be it
 if i am in jail my castle shall become
 my rendezvous [. . .] (*Collected Poetry* 175)

Her pride in her Blackness combined with American individualism, democracy, freedom enables her to evolve an identity for herself. She starts out as a radical and mellows with age advocating that touching the minds of the readers is the best kind of revolution. These are values that lead her to a hybrid identity. After passing through

multiple exposures to two social systems she is constrained to think on new lines about what constitutes spirituality. As a result her spirituality becomes very humanistic and devoid of hollow preachings of the conventional type.

American individualism helps her to assert herself and touch the minds of her readers through words. She gives expression to her belief system by saying that one can change minds not just by revolutions but by connecting with people through words. She searches for a cultural identity combining what is essential in both cultures to reconstruct marginal cultures. In “When I Die” Giovanni says she wants to touch lives and cause a revolution:

and if ever I touched a life i hope that life knows
that i know that touching was and still is and will always
be the true
revolution [. . .] (*My House* 37)

All that she is left with is her ability to use her “human voice” to connect and touch, and bring about change. Literature is an instrument of social change and so she asserts to be heard. She adopts a neo Black conservatism. She says in “The Life I Led”, “i hope my shoulder finds a head that needs nestling” (*Collected Poetry* 203). This redemption is not just her own but a vicarious one – a redemption of her own community. She believes, “we are less lonely when we connect. Art is a connection. I like being a link” (*Prosaic* 254) by touching their minds. What armed revolution could not do words could. In the poem “Desperate Acts” he says: “Its easy to strike back / But hard to understand” (*Quilting* 45).

That the Black woman wishes to empathise with others constitutes one of the sources of her authenticity of voice (*Collected Poetry* xxv). Having suffered for so long Afro-Americans have acquired the quality of empathy. Empathy enables us to collapse the dualistic structures that polarise our world into “us” and “them”. The mainstream have not suffered or been dictated to. They do not possess the quality of empathy. Giovanni articulates a new direction of studying white mainstream cultural dynamics instead of Blacks. In “A Civil Right’s Journey” Giovanni says: “Even when I was in high school, I couldn’t understand why all the studies were of Black people. It seemed to me even then that someone ought to study white people since Black people weren’t the ones who were lynching men and women, bombing churches, shooting people because they wanted to vote [. . .]” (*Blues* 56). She asserts a change saying that people who are normal are not to be studied but those who behave differently are to be studied and changed. In “The Inaugural Poem” Giovanni says:

[. . .] let’s think about the new world we are borning and while we recognize we cannot repay the Indians nor the Blacks nor make whole again the Browns nor the Yellows we do not still think we should allow the Whites to run roughshods over the rest of us [. . .] (*Blues* 29)

In the Bible, in *Exodus* 14: 16-17 it is mentioned that “rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God”. So awaiting and working for change is what these writers of ethnic identity do. Change in attitudes results in change in beliefs. Their suffering has made them aware that they have to have the faith that they would win the final battle when they can speak out not from the fringes, but from the centre which will be acknowledged by their molesters and their tyrants.

These four writers perceive the American version of Christianity to be inadequate for the simple reason that there is hardly any justice despite love – the prime tenet of the Christian belief system. Secondly, the prevailing religion victimizes them. Thirdly, they seem to believe that there is no social harmony without justice given and taken. As a result of these they seem to be moving away from the ritualistic Christian religion and veering round a humanistic version of it, with human equality as its main plank as contrasted with discrimination of various kinds. Their spirituality is not out of dogma; it is an experiential identification. Their spirituality is earth earthy. The dynamics of their spirituality is the authenticity of their experiences.

On analyzing, it becomes obvious that a new paradigm shift of spirituality is emerging from these four authors. Their perception of spirituality is refreshingly new and overwhelmingly humanistic. Uncluttered by fanatical religious views and fundamentalist attitudes, unbridled by the heavy baggage of religious dogma, they seem to formulate a vibrant spirituality which is eclectic and accommodative. They seem to absorb and even assimilate different norms and concepts from the two cultures they are in touch with – the mainstream American Christianity and their own, their very own native culture or ethnicity, which may itself be multi-rooted. Their spiritual norms have the hybrid strength of multi-sourcing and being multi-prompt. As a result the new articulation of spirituality is less partisan, narrow and insular than unipolar, fundamentalist needs. Moreover the process of hybridization offers new strengths and extra vitality to these spiritual encounters.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

More than ever before, in contemporary times, every individual is plagued by the question of identity: “who am I?” And for hybrids like Nikki Giovanni, Maxine Hong Kingston, Denise Levertov and Paula Gunn Allen this feeling is problematised still further by the push-pull of ethnic and American elements within. They have not experienced the refugee syndrome or immigrant experience inimically. Their works reveal the exclusionary acts that controlled immigration and immigrants, and the dualities of their experience of life. Today they not only resurrect their identity but also assert themselves from the centre challenging the mainstream. They have altered and replaced previous knowledge that American history is a white oriented one. They have effected a literary insurrection of subjugated voices against the mainstream.

Exposure to cultures enriches one and makes one more tolerant and cosmopolitan. In an interview Allen says that the white Americans “don’t understand that the more cultures you have, the greater your range; your personal range, your intellectual range, and your emotional range is much greater” (Eysturoy 20). The rise of hybrids is a social phenomenon happening all over the world. The hybridity of Levertov is energized by her Hasidic and Christian elements. Levertov’s eco-philosophy arises from her social commitment to man and environment. Besides, American racism and war policies sharpened her senses to all injustices. The terms of dialogue between the Chinese, or the Blacks and American culture are of sexism and racism. Kingston makes use of an ethnic myth with global overtones to advocate peace in contrast to the mainstream’s war

mongering policies. Giovanni reveals her pride in her Blackness and throws the spotlight on the dependency of the White woman on the Black woman. Once involved in a plural consciousness, she an Afro-American, takes on an “Afrocentric” perspective on life, as opposed to the “Eurocentric” orientation of most White Americans.

Black Americans do believe themselves to be very American, perhaps, because there were African slaves in America long before the arrival of most white Europeans. They see themselves as “American” on their own terms, through their own particular cultural heritage. One does not need acceptance or “validation” from white America in order to feel comfortable with oneself. Ania Loomba in *Colonialism / Postcolonialism* says: “Colonialism was not an identical process in different parts of the world but everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history” (2). African Americans are not “colonized” people. They are a people created by the forced synthesis of shared African and European contexts, and they have emerged from this experience with a dynamic and defiant will to survive. This may best describe Giovanni’s tone — dynamic and defiant. Nikki Giovanni, “Princess of Black Poetry” (Boldridge 204) is the product of a strong, vibrant Black community that retains certain values that go all the way back to Africa. She does not have to “break away” from American culture to discover her Blackness, because she always identified herself as a Black woman. Throughout her writings one finds the history of Black American writing with a powerful sense of African values, from the times of the slaves to the present. With obvious pride Giovanni points out that “the history of black people is a paradigm of human triumph” (Boldridge 204). She believes in the goodness and humaneness of mankind. “Although she is at times disconcerted by the

horrifying conditions of our restless, disconcerted age, her idealism and hope are the bed-rock of her life and work” (Boldridge 206). Critics praise Giovanni’s works for their energy, emphasis on orality, the sound of language and the change, challenge and commitment she makes. Her poetry is an outgrowth of the cultural frustration and political exigencies of Black Americans for survival.

The Reds or the Native Americans have all along assisted the White mainstream. But the White mainstream has all along been practising intellectual, social and political apartheid towards the Reds. They seem to claim that they could possess the land, and dictate terms to all and sundry because of their white colour, Christianity and superiority in science and technology. And American individualism, which is a kind of selfishness, promotes only individual interest. Allen says that community is more important than the individual. For if one must remain humane one must remain with fellow human beings. But, American individualism has failed in this regard. The White mainstream does not empathize with the fellowmen suffering in their own land. The White society is patriarchal, so White women clamour for equality. Allen’s Laguna society is one where women are foregrounded. But this society is not matriarchal, meaning women do not dominate like in a patriarchy but men and women live side by side respecting genders. According to the mainstream, the earth is to be possessed even if in the process it is defiled. Allen says that the mainstream Whites pretend to suffer from amnesia, they forget their mother, England, but do not forget their father America. This trait persists even in their relationship with the earth by excavating, dumping nuclear wastes, establishing nuclear parks and experimenting in nuclear test sites. They have conveniently forgotten how the earth has enriched them so abundantly. Even Kingston

assumes a new cultural role for herself relying on memory and imagination to write her life, like in a talk story. Representation of Chinese culture and literacy gives her cultural autonomy.

The hybridity of Kingston, Allen, Giovanni and Levertov energizes them to voice the injustices meted out to them by community and the mainstream. Through their life and works these writers give sustenance to ethnic women. By writing they have moved back to the centre with amplified voices. They make a space for themselves ending up more logical and rational. They decolonize themselves having earned for themselves autonomy and self-determination. On the one hand they are progressive and individualistically American, on the other hand their ethnic ethos is manifest in the assertion of their cultural values. They envision a trans-international community. They create a universal awareness that the so-called progress can retard many rich cultures and often end up in their own erasure. All hybrid ethnic identities possess: 1. a deep sense of kinship with their community; 2. a desire to forward the interests of their community but not always over the interests of the individual; 3. a pervasive sense of spirituality; and 4. a deep pride in native music, folk culture, cuisine and history.

In the rush of civilization persons and their social groups are likely to lose their identity owing to the bulldozing effect of the dominant race. Persons become cogs in a machine, part of a faceless crowd. The loss of identity has painful results. Consequently persons search for their socio-cultural identity. The search reaches a plateau of achievements when they come across an ethnic group to which they can relate themselves. There is the emergence of a new group of individuals who have no specific identity yet group together because of shared contexts. This ethnic alignment may be

cultural, linguistic, religious and even geographic. This phenomenon gets manifested in the new writing across the world. It is manifest in the writings of Kingston, Giovanni, Levertov and Allen.

With globalization today's world is fast shrinking. There is better contact with different cultures. In *Colonialism / Postcolonialism* Ania Loomba says: "And often globalisation is celebrated as the producer of a new and 'liberating' hybridity or multiculturalism [. . .]" (257). There is a kind of universalisation of culture because of the dominance of English. There is a greater use of English for cross international exchange. At the same time the writers under this study act as cultural torch-bearers. Only a plural consciousness is able to comprehend their perspectives, belief systems and experiential grids. Even their spirituality stems from their plural consciousness.

It is out of a sense of belonging that ethnic identities in spite of their differences etch a space for themselves as Americans leaning heavily on the fact that all Americans are immigrants except the Native Indian. They are tagged as ethnic Americans rather than as Americans. But all these ethnic minorities define themselves as Americans like those of Eurocentric descent. There is a strong presence of the American mainstream in their work. But the ethnic constituent is becoming more and more dominant.

Modern Americans have given rise to popular cultures, and America appears as "un Europe" (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 7). The mainstream Americans are a consent conscious people. But when ethnic Americans give their consent to be Americans, the mainstream very cleverly pretend not to have seen or heard. The story of America is one of immigrants and the children of immigrants who are the American people. And yet there is ethnic exclusion that results in assertion of identity. Beneath the mask of

tolerance the cold hostility of the mainstream makes the ethnic identities more articulate.

Theirs is a case as Fanon describes in *Black Skin White Masks*:

‘Brother there is no difference between us’. And yet the Negro *knows* that there is a difference. He *wants* it. He wants the white man to turn on him and shout: ‘Damn Nigger’ Then he would have the unique chance – to ‘show them. . . . (221)

So from “enlightened hybridity” (Gandhi 136) Giovanni, Kingston, Levetov and Allen have proved that they are part of the national fabric and that the mainstream is dependent on them. But this identity articulates itself from a third space judiciously retaining ethnic and American elements. So, “if ethnic writers have displayed much interest in modern forms of communication, then the literary forms of ethnic writing can hardly be expected to be exclusively traditional” (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 247).

The ethnic focus is on the importance of family in shaping the individual. They emphasise the family being the image maker. This sense of not belonging to America as per the norms of the white mainstream, and ostracized amidst one’s family back home, triggers in them the need to preserve their new hybrid culture. Speaking of Allen, Annie O. Esyturoy says that Allen is like the Native Indian potters, “the women, take old pottery and grind it up and put it into the clay-mix with the new pot. The reason why they do it that way is that the clay will bond more securely all round so it will not fall apart easily. If you don’t do it right, the pot will blow up when you are cooking it; it doesn’t have the right consistency” (17). Thus she blends ethnic and American constituents to consolidate her identity. Neither ethnic nor mainstream, they plead for a global citizenship. Man feels alienated out of this sense of not belonging, and what he craves for is love, acceptance

and acknowledgement. When he does not receive this he asserts his culture to make his presence felt.

The absence of the pure race is more visible today. Leaving one's geographical boundary is bound to lead to mixing of cultures. Yet the process of assimilation takes place only to some extent. Since assimilation is fraught with opposition and recalcitrance, cultural differences are retained with great vigour by ethnic identities slowly leading to hybridity and a new identity as a part of assimilation.

Since emigration is increasing by leaps and bounds those who radically believe that leaving one's home-land cannot taint one's culture, are in for a rude shock. Exposure to other cultures can cause change in one's own attitude and thinking, and this is enough food for thought. Attempts are made at retaining ethnicity. But ethnicity is not retained in the same sense as in the past. There is a resurgence of ethnicity but it is hybridized with ethnic and the mainstream elements. Like the others Kingston is less interested "in what the myths were in China than in what they have become in America" (Skenazy xiii). She keeps Chinese myths alive in a new way. Allen, Kingston, Levertov and Giovanni remake the past usurping forms meant for socialization and recreate them as the shape of their resistance. They play on the sustaining importance of ethnic culture, and redesign it for an American life.

A large number of studies have explored the process of acculturation and assimilation but not much study has been made on the dialectics involving community norms and the mainstream norms from the perspective of the hybrid. Also it is in the writings of these ethnic identities that one can trace the dynamics of the articulations of

the ethnics as opposed to the mainstream's stereotyped representation of the ethnic reality.

Ethnicity is being reinvented and reinterpreted by the writer who accepts his bicultural identity. Hybridity is not outdated but a modern sense of belonging to dualities. In the Introduction to *The Invention of Ethnicity* Sollors says that, "ethnicity does not serve as a totalizing metaphor but simply as a perspective on to psychological, historical, social and cultural forces" (xx). By the search for this identity they make their characters do what they wish so that it becomes self-fulfilling. It is said that "writers have the power to change the world only a little bit at a time. We conquer a reader at a time. We change the atmosphere of the world, and we change moods here and there" (Skenazy xviii). The writers of ethnic identity have provided Americans with a new world, a new grammar and a new imagery. Racial or ethnic accents fracture the language in a creative fashion. The existence of different "Englishes" is a proof of alteration and change to the English language.

For these four writers English is a tool to educate the dominant group of the contributions of the minority groups. Ethnic identities fracture English adding a new flavour to it and contribute to what is termed American literature. Afro-Americans, like other ethnic identities under this study, are an oppressed minority; they do not live under the illusion of being American on the same terms as whites. Their diction, style and subject matter are uniquely their own. From her earliest verse Giovanni has written as a woman with a strong and defiant pride in her Blackness -Blackness formed in the particular crucible of American culture. Speaking to Shelley Fisher Fishkin Kingston says: "There's a redemption that takes place in art" (Skenazy xiv).

All writers are creatures and creators of their age, and so are the writers under this study. It is marginalisation that resulted in ethnic revivalism. So they have made a different world combining ethnic and American influences. Kingston wishes “to remake the world that has made her” (Skenazy ix). Myths designed to demean, in turn, liberate her. Like the others she resists blind conformity. Levertov, Kingston, Giovanni and Allen are representatives or models for upcoming writers and hybrids. Speaking of Kingston, Skenazy says: “She has opened the way to a whole generation of Asian American writers who have found a national audience for the first time” (Skenazy vii). They have given voice to their marginalized communities. They violate a series of cultural injunctions and hence are transgressors of both community and mainstream. They write what radicalism dictates, and to renew women’s position within their cultural traditions. They act as translators or intermediaries between cultures revealing ethnic American histories and the mainstream assumptions. Allen tries to bridge the gap between both the Native American and Anglo worlds. She is able to make the reader understand the common world of American Indian tradition.

What Levertov, Giovanni, Kingston and Allen do when they feel stifled in the world they live is that they try to change and see things from a new perspective. They cannot escape this. Allen speaks to Claudia Tate: “We’ve got to live in the real world. If we don’t like the world we’re living in, change it. And if we can’t change it, we change ourselves” (Giovanni and Tate 189). That is why it is said that ethnicity and modernization go hand in hand. The hybrid is bound to retain ethnic and American elements since “ethnicity is continuously created anew” (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 245).

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line, and this problem persists in the twenty first century too. And this study is a global warning that ethnocentrism as practised by the mainstream can destroy modern societies as is evidenced in ethnic strifes. One notices that the white man is decentered. And from ethnicity to neo-ethnicity there are the emerging contours of an epistemic shift.

Kingston, Levertov, Giovanni and Allen assert their identity transcending the reductive mainstream paradigm in a society in which the dominant culture claims to be superior to a minority culture. But the fact is that all cultures are different and it is their differences that make them unique. Ethnic identity is likely to be asserted as a social phenomenon all over the world in spite of all attempts at integration and merger of differences.

Modernity has destroyed social ecology and unless man begins to repair the wear and tear of his own misdeeds he will speed up his own end. Levertov in the Foreword to her book, *The Life Around Us* says:

In these last few decades of the twentieth century it has become ever clearer to all thinking people that although we humans are a part of nature ourselves, we have become, in multifarious ways, an increasingly destructive element within it, shaking and breaking ‘the great web’ – perhaps irremediably.” (xi)

Levertov as a poet of social commitment voices her dread at human misdeeds. Gender equality, environmental concern, and tolerance of races will not upset the socio-economic balance, and will foster socio-cultural integration.

These writers re-open closed and demarcated boundaries, and awaken the mainstream from their complacency. They return the colonial gaze and re-emphasise with their amplified voice that relationships between the First World and Third World play a role in defining the contours of the global village. “[. . .] often ‘histories from below’ are usually written from above” (qtd. in Loomba 257) – a reminder of the enormous distance between subalterns and the mainstream. The decolonization of hegemonic representations is the decolonization of received knowledge. The ethnic identities, through their self assertion, prove this beyond doubt.

Human society is in a state of flux in almost every aspect. The transitory stage we are in is that of fast globalisation. Our relationship to people and societies is on the fast track of change. As a result we have a new emergence of hybrids. Societies have become multicultural and multilingual. The upsurge of new identities like those of the hybrids discloses a change in their attitudes and behaviour as manifested in all their relationships. Even though their emotions are the same, the way they deal with them is different because of a plural consciousness and a cosmopolitan outlook. Writers like Kingston, Giovanni, Levertov and Allen are hybrids who relate meaningfully with their community, the mainstream and the world as visible in their works. Their works encompass local events that are pushed further to have a universal significance, and often put an end to Community and Western malaise. So these writers, out of their social commitment and new articulations, reconstruct the need to be humane and sensitive to all members of the human species.

WORKS CITED

Primary Sources

- Allen, Paula Gunn. *A Cannon Between My Knees*. New York: Strawberry, 1981. N. pag.
- . *Coyote's Daylight Trip*. Albuquerque: La Confluencia, 1978.
- . *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook*. Boston: Beacon, 1991.
- . *Life is a Fatal Disease: Collected Poems 1962-1995*. Albuquerque: West End, 1997.
- . *Off the Reservation: Reflections on Boundary-Busting, Border-Crossing Loose Cannons*. Boston: Beacon, 1998.
- . *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2004.
- . *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. 1986. Boston: Beacon, 1992.
- . *Shadow Country*. Los Angeles: U of California, 1982.
- . *Skins and Bones: Poems 1979-87*. Albuquerque: West End, 1988.
- , ed. and introd. *Song of the Turtle: American Indian Literature 1974-1994*. New York: Ballantine, 1996.
- , ed. *Spider Woman's Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women*. New York: Fawcett, 1990
- . *Star Child*. Marvin, South Dakota: Blue Cloud Quarterly, 1981. N. pag.

- , ed. *Studies in American Indian Literature: Critical Essays and Course Designs*.
New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1983.
- , ed. *Voice of the Turtle: American Indian Literature 1900-1970*. 1994. New York:
Ballantine, 1995.
- . *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1983.
- Giovanni, Nikki. *Black Feeling, Black Talk/ Black Judgement*. 1970. New York:
William Morrow, 1971.
- . *Blues For All the Changes: New Poems*. New York: William Morrow, 1999.
- . *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni: 1968-1998*. Introd. Virginia C. Fowler.
New York: William Morrow – Harper Collins, 2003.
- . *Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day*. Introd. Paula Giddings New York: Quill-William
Morrow, 1978.
- . *A Dialogue: James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni*. Foreword Ida Lewis New York:
J.B. Lippincott, 1973.
- . *Ego-tripping: and Other Poems for Young People*. New York: Lawrence Hill, 1973.
- . *Love Poems*. New York: William Morrow, 1997.
- . *My House*. 1972. New York: William Morrow, 1974.
- , comp. and afterword. *Night Comes Softly: An Anthology of Black female Voices*.
New York: William Morrow, 1970.
- . *A Poetic Equation: Conversations Between Nikki Giovanni and Margaret Walker*.
Washington D. C.: Howard UP, 1974.
- . *The Prosaic Soul of Nikki Giovanni*. Introd. Barbara Crosby. New York: Perennial-
Harper Collins, 2003.

- . *Quilting the Black- Eyed Pea: Poems and not Quite Poems*. New York: William Morrow – Harper Collins, 2002.
- . *Spin a Soft Black Song*. Rev. ed. 1985. U.S.A.: Farrar, 1987.
- . *Those who Ride the Night Winds*. New York: Quill-William Morrow, 1983.
- . *The Women and the Men*. New York: William Morrow, 1975. N.pag.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong. *Chinamen*. New York: Ballentine, 1981.
- . *The Fifth Book of Peace*. New York: Vintage, 2004.
- . *Hawai'i one Summer*. San Francisco: Meadow 1987. Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1998.
- . *To be the Poet*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002.
- . *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*. Knopf, 1989. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- . *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. 1976. New York: Knopf, 1984.
- Levertov, Denise. *Breathing the Water*. New York: New Directions, 1987.
- . *Candles in Babylon*. New York: New Directions, 1982.
- . *Collected Earlier Poems 1940 - 1960*. New York: New Directions, 1979.
- . *Denise Levertov Poems 1960 - 1967*. New York: New Directions, 1983.
- . *Denise Levertov Poems 1968 - 1972*. New York: New Directions, 1987.
- . *Denise Levertov: New and Selected Essays*. New York: New Directions, 1992.
- . *A Door in the Hive*. New York: New Directions, 1989.
- . *Evening Train*. New York: New Directions, 1992.
- . *The Freeing of the Dust*. New York: New Directions, 1975.
- . *The Life Around Us*. New York: New Directions, 1997.

- . *Life in the Forest*. New York: New Directions, 1978.
- . *Light up the Cave*. New York: New Directions, 1981.
- . *Oblique Prayers*. New York: New Directions, 1984.
- . *The Poet in the World*. New York: New Directions, 1973.
- . *Sands of the Well*. New York: New Directions, 1996.
- . *The Stream & the Sapphire: Selected Poems on Religious Themes*. New York: New Directions, 1997.
- . *Tesserae: Memories and suppositions*. 1995. New York: New Directions, 1996.
- . *This Great Unknowing: Last Poems*. 1999. Afterword. Paul A. Lacey. New York: New directions, 2000.

Interviews

- Allen, Paula Gunn. Interview with Franchot Ballinger and Brian Swann. "Interview: Paula Gunn Allen." *MELUS* 10.2 (1983): 3-25.
- Giovanni, Nikki. Interview with Arlene Elder. "A *Melus* Interview: Nikki Giovanni." *MELUS* 9.3 (Winter 1982): 61-75.
- Levertov, Denise. Interview with Lorrie Smith. "An Interview with Denise Levertov." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 24 (1985): 596-604.

Secondary Sources

- Ahokas, Pirjo. "'Crossing The Sun and Lifting into the Mountains?' The Eccentric Subject in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*." *American Studies Scandinavia*. 27.2 (1995): 103-25.
- Alba, Richard D., ed. *Ethnicity and Race in the USA: Toward the Twenty-first Century*. London: Routledge, 1985.

- “animisim”. *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. 10th ed. 1999.
- Anzaluda, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/AuntLute, 1987.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Banton, Michael. *Race Relations*. London: Tavistock, 1967.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995. Chennai: T.R. Publications, 1999.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. London: Vintage-Random, 2000.
- Beauvoir, Simon de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. and Ed. H.M. Parshley, 1949. London: Vintage, 1997.
- Benedict, Ruth. “Ethnic Groups.” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Vol 5. Ed. David Sills David L. New York: Macmillan, 1968.
- Blinde, Patricia Lin. “The Icicle in the Desert: Perspective and Form in the Works of Two Chinese-American Women Writers.” *MELUS* 6.3 (1979): 51-71.
- Boldridge, Effie J. “Windmills or Giants? The quixotic Motif and Vision in the Poetry of Nikki Giovanni.” *The Griot*. 14.1 (Spring 1995): 18-25. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 117 (1999): 200-204.
- Bruchac, Joseph. “I Climb the Mesas in My Dreams: An Interview with Paula Gunn Allen.” *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1987. 1-21.
- Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. 1923. New York: Charles Scribner`s Sons, 1970.

- . *Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters*. New York: Schocken Books, 1948.
- Cashmore, E. Ellis and Barry Troyna. *Introduction to Race Relations*. London: Routledge, 1983.
- Chametzky, Jules. "Beyond Melting Pots, Cultural Pluralism, Ethnicity – or, Déjà vu All Over Again" *MELUS* 16.4 (1989-1990): 3-17.
- . *Our Decentralized Literature*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986.
- Cheung, King-Kok. *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*. Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1993.
- Chin, Marilyn. "A *Melus* Interview: Maxine Hong Kingston." *MELUS* 16.4 (Winter 1989-1990): 57-74.
- Cook, Martha. "Nikki Giovanni: Place and Sense of Place in Her Poetry." *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation* Ed. Tonette Bond Inge. N.p.: U of Alabama P, 1990. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 117 (1999): 189-99.
- Coyle, Martin, et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism 1990*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Cummins, Walter. "'They Fancied Themselves Free': Exploration and Individualism." *Weber Studies* 11.2 (Spring/Summer 1994): 137-47.
- Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology*. Boston: Beacon, 1978.
- Danahay, Martin A. "Breaking the Silence: Symbolic Violence and the Teaching of Contemporary 'Ethnic' Autobiography." *College Literature* 18.3 (Oct.1991): 64-79.

- Draper, James P. ed. Introduction. "Paula Gunn Allen." *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 84 (1995): 1.
- Dubois, W. E. B. *In The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: New American Library, 1969.
- Eagleton, Mary. *Working with Feminist Criticism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- Edgar, Andrew and Peter Sedgwick, eds. *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory*. London: Routledge–Taylor, 2004.
- Edmonston, Barry and Jefferey S. Passel. *Immigration and Ethnicity: The Integration of America's Newest Arrivals*. Washington DC: Urban Institute Press, 1994.
- The Encyclopedia Americana Edition*. 1829. Vol.14. Connecticut: Grolier, 1987.
- "Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups." *International Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Vol.1. 473-76. Ed. Frank N. Makgill, 1996. New Delhi: S. Chand, 2000.
- "Ethnocentric". *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. 10th ed. 1999.
- Eysturoy, Annie O. "Paula Gunn Allen with Annie O. Eysturoy." *This is about Vision: Interviews with Southwestern Writers*. Eds. William Balassi, John F. Crawford and Annie O. Eysturoy. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1990. "Paula Gunn Allen." Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 84 (1995): 15-22.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. 1967. New York: Grove, 1968.
- . *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. 1963. London: Penguin, 2001.
- Fifer, Elizabeth. *The International Fiction Review*. (Jan. 1978). "Maxine Hong Kingston." Rpt. in. *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 12 (1980): 312-15.
- Fischer, Michael. "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory." *Writing Culture:*

- The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986. 194-233.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1982.
- . *Power/ Knowledge 1980: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon, et al. 1972. New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- . *Madness and civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason*. Trans. R. Howard. New York: Random, 1965.
- . *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Science*. New York: Random house, 1970. Trans. of *Les mots et Les Choses*. London: Tavistock, 1966.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1972. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents*. London: Hogarth, 1961.
- . *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. London: Ernest Benn, 1914.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. 1963. New York: Dell, 1982.
- Friedman, Jonathan. *Cultural Identity and Global Process*. New Delhi: Sage, 1994.
- “From Bollywood to jibe street.” *Hindu* 17 Jan. 2007: 14.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P., 1998.
- Gelpi, Albert, ed. and introd. *Denise Levertov: Selected Criticism* Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993.
- . E mail to the author. 12 May 2005.
- . E mail to the author. 8 June 2005.

---. "The 'Aesthetic Ethics' of the Visionary Imagination." Introduction. *The Letters of Robert Duncan & Denise Levertov*. Ed. Robert J. Bertholt and Albert Gelpi.

Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004. ix-xxxi

Giovanni, Nikki and Claudia Tate. Interview. *Black Women Writers at Work*. Ed.

Claudia Tate. *Continuum*, 1983. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 64 (1991):

188-91.

Glazer, Nathan and Daniel P. Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto*

Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press,

1963.

---, eds. *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975.

Golz, Sabine I. "How ethnic Am I." *PMLA* 113.1 (Jan. 1998): 46-51.

Gould, Jean. *Modern American Women Poets*. New York: Dodd, 1984.

Gowda, H.H. Anniah. "'If I am not for myself, who is for me.'" Rev. of *The Black*

Diaspora, by Ronald Segal. *Hindu* 20 Aug. 1995: xiii.

Greeley, Andrew M. *Ethnicity in The United States: A Preliminary Reconnaissance*

New York: John Wiley, 1974.

---. *That Most Distressful Nation*. Chicago: Quadrangle, 1972.

Guttmann, Allen. *The Jewish Writer in America: Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity*.

New York: Oxford UP, 1971.

Handlin, Oscar. *The Uprooted*. Boston: Little Brown, 1952.

Hanson, Elizabeth I. *Paula Gunn Allen*. Ed. Wayne Chatterton and James H. Maguire.

Boise: Boise State U, 1990.

- Hardy, Thomas. *Far from the Madding Crowd*. 1874. London: n.p., 1912.
- Harris, William J. "Sweet Soft Response of Possibility: The Poetry of Nikki Giovanni." *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A critical Evaluation*. Ed. Mary Evans. N.p.: Anchor, 1984. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 64 (1991): 193-95.
- Hattori, Tomo. "China Man Autoeroticism and The Remains of Asian America." *Novel* 31.2 (Spring 1998): 215-36.
- Healey, Joseph F. *Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the United States: Inequality, Group Conflict and Power*. California: Pine Forge – Sage, 1997.
- Hobson, Geary, ed. *The Remembered Earth, An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature*. N.M: Red Earth, 1979. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1981.
- The Holy Bible: New King James Version*. N.p.: Thomas Nelson, 1979.
- Hooks, Bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.
- Hunsaker, Steven V. "Nation, Family, and Language in Victor Perera's *Rites* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*." *Biography* 20.4 (1997): 437-61.
- Hunt, Linda. "'I Could Not Figure Out What Was My Village': Gender Vs. Ethnicity in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*." *MELUS* 12.3 (Fall 1985): 5-12.
- Jaskoski, Helen. "Allen's 'Grandmother'" *Explicator* 50: 4 (1992): 247-50.
- Johnston, Sue Ann. "Empowerment Through Mythological Imaginings in *Woman Warrior*." *Biography*. 16.2 (1993): 136-46.

- Juhasz, Susanne. "'A Sweet Inspiration . . . of My People': The Poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks and Nikki Giovanni." *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition*. N.p.: Harper Colophon, 1976. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 64 (1991): 185-87.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *On the Nature of the Psyche*. Trans. R.F.C Hull. 1969. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Karvar, Quanneh. Rev. of *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. *Times Book Review* 25 Jan. 1987: 11. "Paula Gunn Allen." Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 84 (1995): 15.
- Kim, Elaine H. "Asian American Writers: A Bibliographical Review." *American Studies International* 22.2 (1984): 41-77.
- King, Ursula. *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise*. 1989. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania U P, 1993.
- Kinnahan, Linda A. *Poetics of the Feminine: Authority and Literary Tradition* New York: Cambridge U P, 1994.
- Lacey, Paul A. "Denise Levertov: Testimonies of the Lived Life." *Renascence* 53.4 (Summer 2001): 243-55.
- Landry, Donna and Gerald MacLean, ed. "Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors." *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- "Laura Disagrees with Bush." *New Indian Express* 5 May 2006: 13.
- Lavine, T.Z. *From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophical Quest*. New York: Bantam, 1984.

- Lee, Don L. "Nikki Giovanni." *Dynamite Voices*. N.p.: Broadside, 1971. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 64 (1991): 182-83.
- Li, David Leiwei. "The Naming of A Chinese American 'I' Cross-cultural Sign/ifications in *The Woman Warrior*." *Criticism*. 30.4 (Fall 1988): 497-515.
- Linton, Patricia. "'What Stories the Wind would Tell': Representation and Appropriation in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*." *MELUS* 19.4 (Winter 1994): 37-48.
- Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Macleod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000.
- Madsen, Deborah L. "(Dis)figuration: The Body as Icon in the Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston." *YBES* 24 (1994): 237-50.
- Marshall, Gordon, ed. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Marshall, Megan. *The Cost of Loving: Women and the New Fear of Intimacy*. New York: Putnam, 1984.
- Marten, Harry. *Understanding Denise Levertov*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1988.
- Martindale, Don. *Community, Character and Civilization*. London: Collier - Macmillan, 1963.
- McDowell, Margaret B. "Groundwork for a More Comprehensive Criticism of Nikki Giovanni." *Studies in Black American Literature, Vol. II: Belief Vs Theory in Black American Literary Criticism*. Ed. Joe Weixlmann and Chester J. Fontenot. N.p.: Penkevill, 1986. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 117

(1999): 179-88.

Melchior, Bonnie. "A Marginal 'I': The Autobiographical Self Deconstructed in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*." *Biography* 17.3 (1994): 281-95.

Millet, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. 1969. New York: Avon Books, 1971.

Mills, Ralph J, Jr. "Denise Levertov: The Poetry of the Intermediate." *Poets in Progress*. Ed. Edward Hungerford. 2nd ed. N.p.: Northwestern U P, 1967. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 2 (1976): 242-43.

Milspaw, Yvonne J. Rev. of *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. *Journal of American Folklore* 103.408 (Apr.-Jun.1990): 245-47. "Paula Gunn Allen." Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 84 (1995): 26-27.

Mitchell, G. Duncan, ed. *A New Dictionary of Sociology*. 1968. London: Routledge, 1979.

Mitchell, Mozella G. "Nikki Giovanni." *Afro-American Poets Since 1955*. Ed. Trudier Harris and Thadious M. Davis. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 41. Detroit: Gale, 1985.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory Practicing Solidarity*. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2003.

Moi, Toril. "Feminist, Female, Feminine." *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. London: Macmillan, 1989.

Myers, Victoria. "The Significant Fictivity of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman*

- Warrior.*” *Biography* 9.2 (Spring 1986):112-25.
- Nasta, Susheila, ed. *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk*. New York: Routledge-Taylor, 2004.
- Nelson, Rudolph L. “Edge of the Transcendent: the Poetry of Levertov and Duncan.” *Critical Essays on Denise Levertov*. Ed. Linda Wagner-Martin. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991.
- Nevins, Allan and Henry Steele Commager. *A Short History of the United States*. New enlarged ed. New York: Modern Library, 1956.
- Nishime, LeiLani. “Engendering Genre: Gender and Nationalism in *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior*.” *MELUS* 20.1 (1995): 67-82.
- Ordonez, Elizabeth J. “Narrative Texts by Ethnic Women: Rereading The Past, Reshaping The Future.” *MELUS* 9.3 (1982): 19-28.
- Ostriker, Alicia. “In Mind: The Divided Self and Women’s Poetry.” *Midwest Quarterly* 24.4 (1983): 351-65.
- Pecheux, Michel. *Language Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious*. Trans. Harbans Nagpal. 1975. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Rabine, Leslie W. “No Lost Paradise: Social Gender And Symbolic Gender in The Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston.” *Signs* 12.3 (1987): 471-92.
- Rabinowitz, Paula. “Eccentric Memories: A Conversation with Maxine Hong Kingston.” *Michigan Quarterly* 26.1 (1987): 177-87.
- Rexroth, Kenneth. “The Hasidism of Martin Buber.” *World Outside the Window: Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth*. New York: New Directions, 1987.
- Rose, Shirley K. “Metaphors and Myths of Cross-Cultural Literacy: Autobiographical

Narratives by Maxine Hong Kingston, Richard Rodriguez, and Malcolm X.”

MELUS 14.1 (1987): 3-15.

Roy, Harvey Pearce. *Savagism and Civilization*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1965.

Ruthven, K.K. *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.

Salo, Matt T. “The Expression of Ethnicity in Rom Oral Tradition” *Western Folklore*. 36 (1977): 33-56.

Schueller, Malini Johar. “Theorizing Ethnicity and Subjectivity: Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Tripmaster Monkey* and Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*.” *Gender* 15 (1992): 72-85.

Sevenhuijzen, Selma and Petra De Vries. “The Women’s Movement and Motherhood.” *A Creative Tension: Exploration in socialist Feminism*. Ed. Anja Meulerbelt et al. London: Pluto, 1984.

Seymour-Smith, Charlotte. “Ethnicity.” *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*. London: Macmillan 1987.

Showalter, Elaine. *Speaking of Gender*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Siefer, Nancy. *Nobody speaks for me!* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.

Singh, Sushila. *Feminism, Theory, Criticism, Analysis*. Delhi: Pencraft, 1997.

Skenazy, Paul and Terra Martin, ed. *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston*. Jackson: U P of Mississippi, 1998.

Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.

- , ed. *The Invention of Ethnicity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.
- . "Theory of American Ethnicity, or: 'S Ethnic? /TI and American/TI, DE or United (W) States S S1 and Theor?'" *American Quarterly* 33.3 (1981): 257-83.
- Spencer, Metta. *Englewood Cliffs*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1979.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Methuen, 1987.
- Spretnak, Charlene, ed. *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement*. New York: Anchor Press, 1982.
- Sung, Betty Lee. *Mountain of Gold: The Story of the Chinese in America*. New York: Macmillan, 1967.
- Surman, Diana. "Inside and Outside in the Poetry of Denise Levertov." *Critical Quarterly* 22.1 (Spring 1980): 57-70.
- Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Boston: Little Brown, 1993.
- Tindall, George. *The Ethnic Southerners*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1976.
- Trudier, Harris and Thadious M. Davis, ed. *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Afro-American Poets Since 1955*. Vol 41. Detroit: Gale, 1985.
- Van Dyke, Anette. "The Journey back to Female Roots: A Laguna Pueblo Model." *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*. Ed. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow. New York: New York UP, 1990. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 84 (1995): 28-34.

- Wagner, Linda Welshmier. *Denise Levertov*. New York: Twayne, 1967.
- Wakoski, Diane. "Song of Herself." *Women's Review of Books* V.5 (Feb 1988): 7-8.
Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 66 (1991): 252-3.
- Wang, Veronica. "Reality and Fantasy: The Chinese-American Woman's Quest for Identity." *MELUS* 12.3 (Fall 1985): 23-31.
- Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature*. 1949. New York: Harcourt, 1962.
- Wilber, Ken. *No Boundary: Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth*. Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala, 1981.
- Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia. "Necessity and Extravagance in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Art and the Ethnic Experience*." *MELUS* 15.1 (Spring 1988): 4-26.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*. London: Random, 1991.
- Xiques, Donez. Rev. of "Gemini". *America*. 126.7 19 Feb. 1972: 186-87. "Nikki Giovanni." Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 64 (1991): 184-85.
- Yalom, Marilyn. *Women Writers of the West Coast: Speaking of their Lives and Careers*. Santa Barbara: Capra, 1983.